Communication Channels: How to Get the Word Out

Communication Channels

Media Outreach

An overview of how to conduct effective media outreach, including step-by-step advice on how to identify and target your audience, reach out to the media, and evaluate your results.

Media Relations (Traditional and Online)

Puts the media relations skills introduced in the previous media section to use by providing dos and don'ts for interviews as well as sample press releases, media alerts, proclamations, and other helpful tools. In addition, this chapter provides a tutorial on how to write an optimized press release and distribute it online.

Social Media

Social media has expanded the way you can do outreach to your community. Learn about helpful resources and how to develop a social media strategy that works with the resources you have.

Partnerships

Step-by-step instructions and examples on how to maximize outreach efforts by developing partnerships, including suggestions for different types of partners, activities for potential outreach and ideas to gain community involvement.

Media Events

Provides guidance on what type of news constitutes an event and gives suggestions on how to plan an outreach event or press conference, including event ideas, and what to do before, during, and after the event.

Paid Advertising

The overall goal of an advertising strategy is to reach your audience and change behavior or attitudes. This chapter will provide the principal steps to reach that goal.

Public Service Announcements

Gives an overview of what public service announcements (PSA) are versus advertisements, and provides tips and hints about how to place a PSA.

Promising Practices

An overview of Promising Practices with real life examples. Provides a system to submit your agency's lessons learned, what you tried, what worked and what didn't.

Media Outreach

Why media outreach?

One of the most efficient and cost-effective ways to inform members of the community about the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is through local television, radio, and newspapers.

What is media outreach?

Media outreach takes many forms — from a simple call to a reporter to suggest a story, to a formal press release or an organized event. All can be effective. Match your media efforts to what works best in your community.

Why would the media be interested in covering SNAP issues?

There are many compelling sides to the SNAP story. It is about the strength of a local community working together to help those who are less fortunate. It is about people facing challenges and doing what is right for themselves and their families. It has all the elements of an interesting story that local media want to cover. Your local media have both a community responsibility and a business interest in providing readers and viewers with valuable information.

What does media outreach involve?

Media outreach consists of the following seven steps:

1. **SELECT** a target audience.
2. **DEVELOP** a media list.
3. **BRAINSTORM** story ideas.
4. **PREPARE** materials and information.
5. **IDENTIFY** spokespeople.
6. **CONTACT** the media.
7. **EVALUATE** your efforts.

You may not have the time or resources to follow every step. The important thing is to keep the media informed about what you are doing so they can get the word out to eligible people in your community that SNAP benefits are available to them.

How will this toolkit help me with media outreach?

This section of the toolkit elaborates on each of the seven steps. It also provides information on media outreach tactics that require a little more effort, such as media events and getting into the media's editorial section. Regardless of how elaborate your effort is, this section will help you to work more effectively with the press and garner positive media coverage of hunger, nutrition issues, and SNAP.

Understanding that you may be working with limited staff resources, this section of the toolkit also includes tips and template materials to use when you contact the media.

Tips & Tools

Placing stories in your local community's print and broadcast media can lead to bigger things. Frequently, statewide and national media outlets get story ideas from coverage at the local level. Do not be surprised if a story about SNAP outreach in your community is picked up by one of the major networks! Recently, a story about SNAP participation in local media outlets in Pennsylvania and Texas caught the eye of National Public Radio and led to an airing of a positive story about SNAP.

Step 1 Select a Target Audience

Select your audience(s). Determine whom you are trying to reach before you begin your media outreach. Generally, you are trying to reach people who are eligible for SNAP benefits but not receiving them. Specific examples include:

- People 60 years of age or older

- Children

- Families

- Working poor

- Immigrants

National research shows that the most underserved and hardest-to-reach populations tend to be seniors, immigrants, and the working poor. The audience for your community may vary. Talk to people in your local SNAP office to see whom they are trying to reach. Do your own research on underserved populations and the best methods to reach your selected audience(s). For more on this, see the Resources section of this toolkit.

Goals

Before you begin your outreach, establish some simple goals for your effort. Examples include:

- Educating people about the nutrition

- Increasing the number of calls to the local, State, or national toll-free number

- Promoting the EBT card

- Promoting extended hours for SNAP application certification interviews

Step 2 Develop A Media List

Determine the best channels for reaching your target audience by researching the answers to questions listed to the right. Then begin to create a media list, which is a list of local news media organizations and their contact information.

Check with your partner organizations to see if they already have a list that they are willing to share.

Pointers to Develop a Media List

- Check the local phone book for listings of television and radio stations, local daily and weekly newspapers, and magazines.

- Use the U.S. Newspaper List Web site at www.usnpl.com.

- Check the local library for media reference books, such as the Bacon's Media Yellow Book or the News Media Yellow Book.

- Check newspaper and television Web sites. Search their online archives to find names of reporters who have covered stories on SNAP, hunger, poverty, or nutrition in the past. Review the articles previously written or stories broadcast by the reporter to get a feel for her or his style and areas of interest.

- Ask your clients about their preferred local media sources.

- Add reporters' names to your list when you read a story or meet a reporter working on a story about hunger or community groups.

- Add the local offices or bureaus of national media organizations. These are typically located in State capitals or large cities. Wire services like the Associated Press (AP), Reuters, and the Scripps Howard News Service provide articles to local newspapers. Large radio and television networks also distribute stories to local affiliates. A listing of these is provided at the end of this section.

As you build your media list, add the names and contact information (phone, e-mail, fax, address) for specific individuals within each organization. These individuals may include reporters, editors, and/or producers. By appealing to specific individuals, you are more likely to get a response. Double-check to make sure your contact names are up-to-date. Call the main number of the newspaper or station and ask the operator for assistance.

On your list, also make note of publication deadlines so you can contact editors and reporters well in advance of when you hope to actually see your story in print.

 Know your Audience

Does your target audience:

- Listen to certain radio stations?
- Watch particular TV channels?
- Read local community papers or daily newspapers?

Choosing the Most Appropriate Contact

There are a number of individuals within a news organization who shape what is printed or broadcast. People to include on your media list are:

Appropriate Contacts

Newspaper	TV	Radio
Reporters who cover health, social, and family issues	Reporters/on-air personalities	News directors
Writers for the calendar or community events page	Planning/assignment editors	Assignment editors
Community columnists	News broadcast producers	Public affairs show hosts and producers
Editorial page editors	Producers of morning shows or community programs	On-air personalities or commentators
Assignment editors who direct reporters or photographers to cover events		

Keep in mind that each media outlet may have a separate staff that writes for its Web site, and remember to include smaller media outlets, such as local cable access TV stations, community newspapers, and local parenting magazines and tabloids.

Step 3 Brainstorm Story Ideas

Although much of the news covered on TV or in the newspaper is unanticipated, you can sometimes generate interest by calling the media with a compelling story.

What makes your story newsworthy?

Consider the aspects of a news story that kept you engaged and interested. Provide local statistics and stories and offer the reporter an interesting angle.

What are some examples of newsworthy stories?

- Launch of a new program.
- Start of a new outreach effort for a specific audience like seniors, immigrants such as Hispanics, or working poor.
- Information about an organization or a community leader who has recently shown interest in issues such as nutrition or SNAP benefits.
- Community happenings that tie into SNAP issues, such as a factory closing or a new community partnership.

Five Components of a Newsworthy Story

TIMING

The word news means exactly what it says: things that are new. In this electronic age, people are used to receiving immediate news updates. If it happened today, it's news. If the same thing happened last week, it's no longer interesting. Think ahead to upcoming actions, events, holiday or seasonal stories, and volunteer appreciation stories — and plan your media outreach in advance so reporters can get the story while it is still news.

SIGNIFICANCE

The number of people affected by a story is important. If a significant number of people in your community are eligible for SNAP, yet are not tapping into the benefits, this will be considered newsworthy.

PROXIMITY

The closer the story hits to home, the more newsworthy it is.

PROMINENCE

Famous people get more coverage simply because they are famous. But celebrities do not have to come from Hollywood — they can be local politicians, prominent business owners, hometown sports heroes, or key community leaders.

HUMAN INTEREST

Human interest stories appeal to the readers' emotions. Talking about the benefits of SNAP through a first-person account is a good way to personalize what readers or viewers might otherwise think is merely a government program that has no relevancy to their lives.

Step 4 Prepare Materials

Once you have your story idea, get ready to present it to your local media.

How do I prepare my story?

Start by preparing any new materials and collecting background information. You might wish to check with your local SNAP office to see whether they have information you can use that is specific to your community.

In some cases, you might not need to develop any media materials. You may simply call or e-mail a reporter with your pitch (see Step 6).

If your story idea is time-sensitive or about a piece of breaking news, develop a press release.

Sample media materials are provided in the Media Relations section.

Examples of Media Materials That Need to Be Prepared

PRESS RELEASE A 1–2 page document with information about your news. Press releases should be issued only for timely and significant happenings.

MEDIA ADVISORY A 1-page document that lists enough information to pique a reporter's interest without giving away the whole story. Usually, these are sent out before media events (see Media Events section).

PITCH LETTER A brief letter that presents your story idea.

FACT SHEET A document with statistical information about your news.

BIOGRAPHIES Background information about your spokespeople.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ) Information about SNAP benefits, hunger, nutrition issues, and so forth, including such information as locations of local SNAP offices, the local toll-free number, and extended office hours or online applications.

GRAPHICS Charts on local enrollment trends, participation, or numbers of people who are eligible, but not participating.

Step 5 Identify Spokespersons

Official Spokespeople

Identify people whom the media can interview about the story. These may be local health experts, nutritionists, grocers, or human services providers. Be sure you have the full name, title, and contact information of these individuals readily available. Be sure that your spokespeople are approved by their organizations to speak to the media, and that they:

- Know the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP);
- Are available to appear on television or radio, and be interviewed by the print press;
- Are comfortable speaking to media;
- Are able to clearly communicate the point you want to get across;
- Can respond effectively to questions; and
- Will be considered credible, trustworthy sources of information by viewers or readers.

Testimonials

To add a human interest angle to the story, try to find people in your community who would be willing to share their stories with the media and talk about how SNAP benefits helped them get back on their feet. Speak to your partners to see if they can help identify someone like this.

Once someone has been selected, make sure the person is comfortable telling his or her story and has a positive experience to share. You will also need to confirm with the media outlet whether or not they have to use the true identity of the person giving the testimonial. A SNAP recipient may be uncomfortable using his or her name; some individuals might want to use an alias and others might want to just use their first name.

Step 6 Contact The Media

What are some helpful tips on contacting reporters?

- **Select the most appropriate reporters for your specific story.**
  Do not bombard reporters with story ideas that are not relevant to the reporter's beat or specialty. For example, if you are pitching a story about the economic benefits of SNAP, contact the reporter on your media list who covers the local economy.

- **Find out how reporters like to be contacted and respect their time.**
  Ask if a reporter prefers phone calls, e-mail, or news the old-fashioned way — by U.S. mail. Reporters may keep odd hours and juggle several assignments at once. Be respectful of their schedules and how they like to receive information. If you need to send out a press release or media advisory to a mass list rather than individual names, be sure to put e-mail addresses in the blind copy (bcc:) field to avoid sharing e-mail addresses with all the other recipients.

- **Review your talking points before you call reporters.**
  Have your ideas ready (see Media Relations section for a pitch script sample) since most reporters are extremely busy and will give you only a minute or so to make your case before deciding if they are interested.

- **Make sure your e-mail subject line is descriptive but concise.**
  Include a short (about two paragraphs), catchy pitch along with your contact information. Make the reporter's job as easy as possible by providing the most important information in the first paragraph. Include a link to the SNAP Web page (http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/Default.htm), as a reporter will often visit the Web site for insight before calling back.

- **Avoid using all caps or excessive punctuation.**
  Reporters avoid anything that looks like unsolicited e-mail or "spam." Avoid using attachments when contacting a reporter for the first time, as he or she may suspect the attachment of containing a computer virus. Copy and paste relevant text into the body of the e-mail.

- **Introduce yourself fully on phone calls.**
  Reference previous conversations, if applicable, to jog their memory as to who you are and why you're calling. Ask whether it is a good time to talk. If they cannot talk, offer to call back later at their convenience. If they have time to talk, get to your point quickly and gauge their level of interest based on the response. If they are not interested, they will let you know.

- **Be reliable.**
  Nothing will squelch a media relationship faster than a promise you cannot deliver. Do your best to get reporters what they need in advance of their deadlines. However, if you won't be able to come through, let them know as early as possible.

Reporters' Deadlines

PRINT
Call a newsroom between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., when reporters are most likely not in planning meetings or working against a 5 p.m. deadline.

TELEVISION
Call assignment or planning editors after 10 a.m. and before 3 p.m., but not in the hour or so before a noon newscast. It's best to call the assignment desk after the morning planning meeting, which usually ends between 9:30 and 10 a.m.

RADIO
Call early, around 7:30 to 8:30 a.m. After that, staff often have planning meetings, but you can start calling again after 10 a.m. News directors, reporters, and producers are often gone by the afternoon.

- **Follow up.**
  Although some reporters will provide coverage after one phone interview, that is frequently not enough. It is important to be in front of reporters on a consistent basis with compelling information that demonstrates what you are pitching is viable, credible, and worthy of coverage. Be sure to offer reporters the additional elements they would need to round out their stories — photos, Web site information, toll-free numbers, listing of local SNAP offices, and additional resources, if necessary.

- **Know when to keep at it and when to let go.**
  No matter how passionate you are about a story, some reporters will never buy in. A good way to circumvent a quick "no" is to pitch by phone rather than email (unless that is a reporter's preference). This will get you better results and allow you to build the relationships you need to ensure consistent success. When using the phone, leave one message only, and then continue to call at different times of the day until you are able to speak to the reporter. Once you have your content on the line, it is much easier to make your case, as you can engage a reporter in a conversation and handle questions or objections as they arise.

Timing Your Outreach

Monthly publications are typically magazines, often designed to appeal to a particular segment of the community. They are not as focused on time-sensitive news events, and are therefore good channels for communicating "big picture" stories and features. Stories created for monthlies must often be written 3 to 6 months prior to publication date.

Weeklies can come in a magazine or newspaper format, and often are distributed free at grocery stores or other popular community locations. Plan on contacting weeklies 2 to 6 weeks before you hope to see your story in print.

Dailies are defined as local newspapers that focus on breaking news, although they are also good outlets for in-depth features. For feature stories, plan on contacting dailies 2 to 3 weeks before you hope to see your story in print. For time sensitive news stories, contact approximately 1 week out.

Broadcast outlets include television and radio. Broadcast news tends to provide live coverage of news events, and relies on images or audio sound bites to tell the story. Broadcast outlets can also be interested in longer stories, particularly for morning or community shows. For feature-length stories, contact the producer of the segment you are pitching 2 to 3 weeks before you hope to see your story on the air. For more time-sensitive news stories contact approximately 1 week out.

Step 7 Evaluate

Reviewing and analyzing your media outreach allows you to determine whether you reached your goals and what did and didn't work. It also gives you an opportunity to share your success. The end result need not be an exhaustive report, just some information to help you track your efforts.

How can I chart media outreach efforts?

- Set goals before you begin so that you have something to measure (for example, place one newspaper article or TV story about SNAP benefits, promote the local toll-free number, or increase inquiries about SNAP by 10 percent).

- Establish a starting point (known as a baseline), if possible. Take note of how many calls you are getting about SNAP benefits, or how much media coverage you are receiving now. If you do this, you can quantify improvements and increases.

- Begin your analysis as soon as possible after your media push or event so that everything is fresh in your mind.

- Use numbers to paint your success story: "There was a 50-percent increase in media coverage compared to last year," or, "After our appearance on the local radio show, calls about SNAP benefits increased by 20 percent."

- Use anecdotal evidence to show your success: "Many clients remarked that they didn't think they would be eligible for SNAP benefits until they saw the TV story." In addition, use quotes from clients that support your success: "I was surprised to learn that I might still qualify for SNAP benefits even though I have a job."

- Include information on the reach of a media outlet: "An article ran in the Anytown News, which has a circulation of 80,000." This information is usually available on the media outlet's Web site.

- Look at what is said in the media coverage you receive to determine whether you communicated your key points. If you wanted to convey that every accommodation is being made to help elderly people apply for benefits, did that come across in your story?

- Make copies of the newspaper articles that include your contributions. Make sure they are well presented. Keep a file of media coverage that you can easily access.

- Share articles with partners, or incorporate articles in a presentation folder for potential partners.

How do I monitor for media coverage?

Following are some quick and easy ways to monitor coverage on a shoestring budget:

- Check the outlet's Web site. Most searches are free for any time up to a week or month.

- If you submitted an announcement to a newsletter or bulletin, ask about distribution numbers, so you get a rough estimate of how many people read your message.

- If you know a TV story will air at a certain time, record the segment.

- To find out the circulation or audience numbers for newspapers and TV, check the outlet's Web site. If you need to call to ask for this information, the advertising department will usually give it to you.

What are some additional media tracking resources?

NewzGroup Provides comprehensive statewide press clipping services of all daily and weekly newspapers in Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Missouri, South Carolina, Texas, West Virginia, and Wyoming.
http://www.newzgroup.com/

Lexis-Nexis This is probably the most comprehensive online database of full-text news and magazine articles, but it is also among the most expensive of the available services.
www.lexisnexis.com/

GoogleNews Google News is a free news site that aggregates headlines from news sources worldwide, groups similar stories together and displays them according to each reader's personalized interests. Users can set up their page to show the stories that best represent their interests and can also sign up to receive weekly, daily or as-it-happens email alerts.
http://news.google.com/

Clip & Copy Clip&Copy is a specialized online news alert and press clipping service covering a targeted set of news web sites, including leading wire services and hundreds of online newspapers, magazines and trade journals. Clip&Copy ensures that you are not infringing on copyrights as most articles contain instantly accessible rights to make copies, distribute and use for web site postings. Coverage ranges from free to $9.95/month.
http://www.clipandcopy.com/index.asp

Newspaper Clips Monitors thousands of online local, national and worldwide publications including newspapers, TV stations, radio stations, online sites, news wires, press releases, and blogs. Basic coverage starts at $84.95/month.
http://www.newspaperclips.com/npcapp/default.aspx

Lone Buffalo Offers both a daily clipsheet as well as ad hoc services for real time monitoring for certain issues or programs. The service looks a several news sources and delivers the daily and breaking news reports via email.
http://www.lonebuffalo.com/index.html

☑ Keeping a Record of Media Coverage

- Locate either an online or print copy of the story.

- Cut out or print off the title of the publication (also known as the flag, logotype, or masthead).

- Make sure the date and byline (reporter's name) are included on the article. If one or the other is not included on the printed version, type the date and byline (sometimes the byline will be "Staff" or "Reuters") on a separate piece of paper; cut it out.

- Lay the components out on a white, blank piece of paper in the following order: flag, byline, date, and content.

- Tape the components neatly onto your blank paper; make sure the edges are not folded.

- Photocopy your laid out news article. Consider making two copies (one for a report and one for reference.)

10 Tips For Conducting Effective Media Outreach

Tip 1   **Identify who you want to reach.**
Who is your target audience? Do you want to reach all eligible nonparticipants, or do you want to focus on a specific audience, such as seniors or the Latino community?

Tip 2   **Determine the best way to reach them.**
Does your target audience read community newspapers? Do they watch TV? What time of day are they watching TV? Do they listen to the radio? Make a list of the relevant media outlets and reporters.

Tip 3   **Set simple, but measurable goals.**
What do you want to achieve through media outreach? For example, do you want to increase inquiries to the toll-free number, inform people about the nutrition benefits of SNAP?

Tip 4   **Think about the best timing for your story.**
Does your news need to be released immediately? Would it be better to wait for a more opportune time such as after the holidays when people are struggling to make ends meet?

Tip 5   **Think about what you want to say.**
Formulate the message that you want to communicate to your target audience, e.g., promote toll-free number, extended office hours, the nutrition benefits of SNAP.

Tip 6   **Think about ways to make your story interesting.**
Can you get real-life testimonials from SNAP participants? Could a statewide story be tied into your pitch?

Tip 7   **Determine how you are going to communicate your message.**
Will you simply call the reporter and provide background information? Do you need to put together a press release or host a press conference?

Tip 8   **Determine who is going to say it.**
Do you have people lined up that reporters can speak to, like a SNAP office director, a food bank supervisor, or a nutritionist?

Tip 9   **Be targeted in your media outreach.**
Your pitch will be more effective if you reach the right person. Spend some time reading, watching, and listening to the media outlets you will pitch and recent coverage by the reporter you will be contacting. How far in advance do you need to reach out? What time of day would work best? Do reporters prefer email or a phone call?

Tip 10   **Evaluate your results and share.**
Reviewing and analyzing your media outreach lets you know if you reached your goals and what did and did not work. Share your success with others!

Media Relations

The previous sections of this toolkit have mentioned a variety of tools you can use to conduct outreach for increasing participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). This section provides the specific, practical information you need to put these tools to use:

- Interviews
- Pitch scripts and letters
- Media advisories
- Press releases
- Optimized press releases
- Proclamations
- Calendar listings

At the end of the chapter you will find templates and a list of glossary terms relevant to this chapter.

Tips For Successful Interviews

Following are interview tips that you or your organization's SNAP spokespeople can use.

Before The Interview

- Know the reporter, publication/program, interview format, and audience. Go online and look up recent articles written by the reporter and ask your colleagues if they know anything about the outlet or reporter.
- Know your goal for the interview. For instance, do you want to publicize a prescreening event? Let people know about your toll-free number?
- Know what you want to say. Review the talking points in the Introduction section.
- Develop 3-5 key talking points to ensure your message is related.
- Jot down likely questions and appropriate answers.

Telephone Interviews

- Buy preparation time by asking to call the reporter back if the deadline allows.
- Establish an "interview atmosphere" and mindset. Set yourself up in a quiet room with no distractions and have your talking points in front of you. Do not think it's any less formal because it is over the phone.
- Use notes.
- For radio, speak visually — use words to paint pictures. For instance: "The number of hungry people in Pleasantville could fill the football stadium three times over."

Television Interviews

- For men, a dark suit and blue shirt works best. For women, avoid solid black or white, and busy patterns. Bright colors are fine.
- Sit erect, but not stiff, and slightly forward in the chair.
- Resist the urge to shout into the microphone. Speak and gesture naturally.
- Talk to the reporter or interviewer, not the camera.
- Keep a pleasant expression; smile when appropriate.
- Hold your "interview attitude" from the moment you are lit until the interview is completely over and you are sure the camera is off.

Interview Do's

- Asked about a problem? Talk about a solution. For examples, see the Q&A document in the Introduction section.

- Answer the question you wish they had asked. "Bridge" to a related point you want to make. For example:

  Q: Why are so many people going hungry?

  A: It's a complicated issue, but the important thing is that people can get the nutrition support they need through SNAP benefits.

- Speak in headlines. Speak in short, succinct statements that will make good quotes. Offer a conclusion first, briefly and directly, and back it with facts or proof points. For example:

  "SNAP has made big changes recently that make it easier to find out about the program. You can call 1-800-221-5689 to learn more about benefits and how to apply."

- Speak clearly. Avoid jargon and bureaucratese.

- Be engaging, likable.

- Even if a reporter uses a negative statement or slurs, frame your reply as a positive statement.

Interview Don'ts

- Do not fake your expertise. If you do not have the answer to a question, assure the reporter you will find and provide the needed facts in a timely manner (please provide an approximate time to expect the call), or offer to assist the reporter in finding another source.

- Do not overlap the interviewer's question; begin your answer when the reporter is finished.

- Do not be provoked. Keep cool.

- Do not lie to a reporter. If you are uncomfortable responding to a particular question, simply say that you have "no comment." However, if you can, refer them to another appropriate source for the information or let them know you will find out for them.

- Do not over-answer. Short answers are better than long.

- Do not let false charges, facts, or figures offered by a reporter stand uncorrected, for example:

  Q: Why would someone go to the trouble of applying for SNAP if the benefits are only $10 a month?

  A: On average, monthly benefits vary from $86 per person to almost $200 per household. This additional support will help low-income households purchase nutritious foods necessary for a healthy diet.

- Do not fall victim to hypothetical situations and "A or B" dilemmas.

Media Pitch Script

What is a pitch script?

A pitch script is an outline of the key points you need to cover during a phone conversation with a reporter or assignment editor. You can use this pitch script to talk to a reporter before or after sending them a media advisory about an upcoming event.

How much time will I have to make my pitch?

Often you only have 30 - 90 seconds to make your pitch, so you must use them wisely. Practice your pitch aloud once or twice before calling.

Should I read from my script?

No, do not read directly from the script as you talk. The script is to be used as a guide.

Where can I find SNAP participation data to use in my pitch?

You can find updated participation data on the FNS Web site at www.fns.usda.gov/ora/MENU/Published/SNAP/participation.htm.

What if the reporter cannot attend?

If the reporter cannot attend, ask if you can send a photograph or perhaps arrange a phone interview with one of your spokespeople afterwards.

Pitch Script Template

Following are two examples of pitch scripts. The ineffective script does not provide the reporter with enough details to cover the event and does not present a case. The effective script politely asks if the reporter has time to talk and efficiently outlines pertinent event information.

Effective:

"Hello, my name is XX and I am calling from the Hunger Organization. Is this a good time?" [*Or, "Do you have a minute?" If not, ask when you can call back.*]

"Because XX low-income elderly people in [NAME OF STATE/TOWN/CITY] are living on the edge of hunger, Hunger Organization is kicking off a 'Benefit Bus' tour on Monday to help the older population in [NAME OF STATE/TOWN/CITY] access SNAP benefits without the bother of finding transportation to a local SNAP office.

"This bus tour will span X days and X locations. [Have additional details handy, such as a media advisory, in case you are asked questions about the event.] SNAP outreach coordinators will be on hand to provide a checklist of all necessary paperwork needed to apply, and to conduct prescreenings for benefit eligibility.

"I hope you'll agree that this is something you or your station/paper would be interested in covering. May I fax or e-mail you a media advisory? [*Or, I have faxed/e-mailed you a media advisory about this event to provide you with additional information.*]"If you have any questions about the event or our program, or need to reach us, my name is XX and my number is XXX-XXXX." [*For voicemail, repeat name and number.*]

Ineffective:

"Hi! I just wanted to tell you that Hunger Organization will be holding an event on Monday. The antihunger group works with members of the community to provide SNAP benefits and…"

Pitch Letter

What is a pitch and what are some examples of a pitch?

A pitch is contact with a journalist or editor to introduce story ideas or other salient information. "Pitching" most often refers to media outreach efforts to obtain coverage; however, outreach efforts to place PSAs or secure partnerships are also forms of pitches.

When to Use a Pitch Letter

A pitch letter makes the case for covering a specific story, especially a story that is "evergreen" or is not tied to a specific event and can be written at any time.

The Importance of a Pitch Letter

More than a phone call, the pitch letter allows you to outline what you are doing and why it is valuable. A good pitch letter has staying power. If it doesn't generate a story today, it may tomorrow.

The Format of a Pitch Letter

A pitch letter can be used in a variety of formats — mail, fax, email. If you choose to send a pitch letter via mail, put it on your letterhead. The points outlined in the "Developing and Selling the Story" section of this toolkit will also come in handy as you create your pitch letter.

A template of a pitch letter is included at the end of this chapter.

Pitch Letter Template

Dear [NAME OF REPORTER],

Have you ever had to decide whether to buy medicine for your sick child or buy food? Have you ever had to choose between paying the heating bill and having enough food for dinner? Every day, thousands of low-income people in [NAME OF STATE/TOWN/CITY] grapple with issues like these. But they don't have to.

There are XX people living on the edge of hunger in [NAME OF STATE/TOWN/CITY]. SNAP helps low-income Americans purchase nutritious, healthy food. However, only half of those eligible to receive SNAP benefits are currently enrolled.

[ORGANIZATION NAME] is kicking off a SNAP outreach effort in [NAME OF STATE/TOWN/CITY] by *[Describe the activity you would like the media to report on, such as hosting a health fair or prescreening event, volunteering, distributing informational fliers, promoting events, etc., And be sure to use language to get their attention]*. The goal of this outreach effort is to ensure that everyone who is eligible for SNAP knows about it and is able to access benefits.

SNAP is a win-win for low-income families and individuals, as well as for the local economy. By helping them defray the costs of groceries, SNAP benefits allow recipients to purchase more healthy and nutritious food. These benefits also help local retailers and the local community by bringing Federal dollars into the area.

Given some of your recent stories, I thought you would be interested in learning more about our community outreach effort, and I look forward to speaking with you in further detail. I can be reached at (XXX) XXX-XXXX to answer any questions you may have or provide you with background information.

Best regards,

[YOUR NAME]
[TITLE]
[CONTACT INFORMATION]

Media Advisories

What is a media advisory?

A media advisory is a one-page document loaded with information about the who, what, when and where of your planned event — without giving away the entire story.

What goes out first, the media advisory or the press release?

The media advisory is sent in advance of a press release.

What is the goal of a media advisory?

The goal is to get your event on the media's calendars and planning books. Using your organization's letterhead, write your advisory in a way that will interest the press, without giving away so many details that they get the full story without having to attend the event.

How do I write a media advisory?

As demonstrated in the template below, begin with a headline that informs the media that something important or "newsworthy" is happening, followed by a secondary heading with additional facts.

When should I distribute the media advisory?

See the Media Outreach section for more information on when to distribute a media advisory.

What Type of Information Should I Include in the Advisory?

- **WHAT** As in a press release, the first sentence should describe the purpose or "what" of your event in a uniquely newsworthy way. Like your pitch, the media advisory should have a "hook" or angle to get the attention of the media.

- **WHEN** The "when" section outlines the specific date and time of the event.

- **WHO** The "who" section lists event attendees in order of prestige — for example, a State official would be featured before a local official.

- **WHERE** The "where" states the exact address of the event, and includes directions and parking information if necessary.

- **WHY** The "why" section provides background information for the media, including relevant statistics and a brief description of your organization. This section should also reference other resources, if available, such as a Web site, video clips or radio sound bites.

Media Advisory Template

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: [NAME OF DESIGNATED MEDIA CONTACT]
[(AREA CODE) PHONE #]
[CELL# or E-MAIL]

[TITLE OF STORY]
[Subhead to identify story line]

WHAT:　　[Explain the media event. Ex: What income does a family in (local area) need to meet basic needs? What types of subsidies and supports are in place to help (local area) families make ends meet? What is being done to help lift the earnings of low-income working families in (local area)?

These are the kinds of questions that will be answered at a briefing to release a report on the cost of living in (local or State name) and to kick off a campaign to help local area) families on their path to economic security.)]

[BULLET LIST OF KEY POINTS]

WHEN:　　[DATE & TIME]

WHERE:　　[NAME OF ORGANIZATION]
[STREET ADDRESS]
[CITY, STATE]
[PHONE]

WHO:　　[NAME, TITLE & ORGANIZATION]
[NAME, TITLE & ORGANIZATION]
[NAME, TITLE & ORGANIZATION]
[NAME, TITLE & ORGANIZATION]

Sponsors of the event are: [LIST ORGANIZATIONAL OR PRIVATE SPONSORS]

How to Write a Press Release

Tip 1 THE HEADLINE The headline of your press release should be as dramatic as possible without sounding exaggerated. Will your program affect the community in a big way? Think about what will grab the attention of a news reporter. Your headline will tell the news.

Tip 2 WRITING STYLE The upside-down pyramid is a standard style of news writing. The broad base at the top of the pyramid represents the most newsworthy information in the story, and the narrow tip at the bottom represents the least newsworthy information in the story. This enables the story to be shortened by cutting from the bottom without losing the most important details. Similarly, when you write a press release in the upside-down pyramid format, you put the most newsworthy information at the beginning and the least newsworthy information at the end.

Tip 3 PARAGRAPH ONE The first paragraph states the news or announcement and includes supporting information. Make sure you have addressed the who, what, when, where, and why of the story.

Tip 4 PARAGRAPH TWO A quote often starts the second paragraph and delivers a major message point of your effort. It can state an opinion and add a human element to the story. Generally, the person writing the release will draft a quote to effectively communicate the point.

Tip 5 USE OF QUOTES Quotes must be approved by the person to whom the quote is attributed. Quotes are often adjusted to respond to that person's concerns, tone, and style. Be sure to make the quotes conversational and brief; this increases their chances of being picked up and repeated. You should not quote more than two people. Quoting from too many sources causes confusion.

Tip 6 PARAGRAPH THREE This paragraph contains more information on the event or announcement. You could include interesting and relevant facts that are a part of your main message. You can amplify your message with another quote either from the same spokesperson or from a different source. Be sure the quotes are conversational and brief.

Tip 7 LAST PARAGRAPH This paragraph should tell the public what you want them to know about your organization. For example, how long it has been in the community and/or how people can contact you.

Tip 8 LOCAL OR REGIONAL MEDIA You will be writing for local or regional media, so your press release should provide details about how the news affects your community. Your local news outlets will be more interested in a story whose impact is felt locally. That said, you should also provide some national context — like information about SNAP benefits, trends, and national studies.

How to Write a Press Release

Tip 9 ACRONYMS, JARGON, AND TECHNICAL LANGUAGE Do not use acronyms, jargon or highly technical language in your press release.

Tip 10 LENGTH OF PRESS RELEASE Your press release should be to-the-point and a maximum of one to two pages. Few reporters will read beyond a second page. A press release is not the right forum to issue thank-you's and acknowledgements.

Tip 11 PROOFREAD YOUR RELEASE Always make time to review and edit your release. Correct all spelling and typographical errors. Have someone unfamiliar with the program look over the release to see if the messages are clear to them.

Tip 12 LETTERHEAD Print the release on your organization's letterhead so that it looks official.

Press Release Layout Suggestions

1. **CONTACT INFORMATION** Always include up-to-date contact information on your press release in the upper right-hand corner. The contacts you list should be easily accessible; you may wish to include more than one person. Because reporters often work on tight deadlines and may need to reach your contact immediately, consider including a cell phone number on your release.

2. **PARAGRAPH ONE** The first paragraph of your press release should include the city from which you are releasing the information and the date.

3. **SPACING** To ensure ease of reading, use at least a space and a half or double space between lines. Make sure you leave enough margin space, at least 3/4 ", for reporters to make their own notes.

4. **FORMAT** If your press release is more than a page, you should write "- more -" at the bottom of the page to indicate that it continues. You should also write "Page Two" in the upper left-hand corner of the page so that reporters can follow the release easily. Finish the release by inserting "###" at the end. This indicates that there is no more copy.

An annotated template of a press release is included at the end of this chapter.

Press Release Template

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
[DATE]

CONTACT: **1**
[YOUR NAME OR APPROPRIATE CONTACT]
[(AREA CODE) PHONE #]
[CELL# or E-MAIL]

[HUNGER ORGANIZATION] AND [CITY GROCER]
KICK OFF "FILL THE CART" CAMPAIGN

Outreach Effort Underway to Educate [YOUR COMMUNITY] Low-Income Families and Individuals about Nutrition and SNAP Purchase Power

2 **[YOUR CITY, STATE, DATE]** – [HUNGER ORGANIZATION] and [CITY GROCER] kicked off the "Fill the Cart" campaign today – a major outreach initiative to increase enrollment in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Working together, the two will educate [YOUR COMMUNITY'S] low-income families and individuals about nutritious and healthy food which can be purchased using SNAP benefits. [CITY GROCER] has also developed a recipe book highlighting sample healthy menus and an easy-to-use shopping list featuring nutritious items that can be purchased using SNAP benefits. The recipe book will be distributed at local [CITY GROCER] stores, farmers markets and health fairs. *[Add specific details about outreach effort]*

"[INSERT QUOTE HERE]," said [YOUR ORGANIZATION'S] Executive Director, president or spokesperson.

3 SNAP is a win-win for the [CITY] community – for both residents and retailers. Funded with Federal dollars, each $5 in new SNAP benefits generates almost twice that amount in economic activity for the community. For a household of four, the average benefit is about $200 a month. Research shows that low-income households participating in SNAP have access to more food energy, protein, and an array of essential vitamins and minerals in their home food supply. *[Add other relevant information on the event of announcement – i.E. Interesting/relevant statistics, economic benefit, EBT card versus paper coupons.]*

"[INSERT SECOND QUOTE HERE]," said [SNAP office contact, partner, or another key community leader.]

[NAME OF ORGANIZATION] is community-based organization serving the [NAME OF AREA] community for 25 years. [NAME OF ORGANIZATION] raises awareness about the nutrition benefits of SNAP through outreach including prescreening events, cooking demonstrations and a toll-free information hotline. For more information about SNAP, and what you can do in [NAME OF CITY/TOWN] to help further [NAME OF ORGANIZATION]'s mission, call [PHONE NUMBER OF ORGANIZATION] or visit [YOUR Web site, if applicable].

4   ###

What is an optimized press release?

An optimized press release is similar to a traditional release. It contains news-worthy and buzz-worthy information that you want to convey to your audience. It includes a strong and catchy headline, a summary, and an introductory paragraph. Like a traditional press release, you can also include quotes and references.

Unlike a traditional release, optimized releases can include hyperlinks, images, and videos, and are often edited to include "keywords" to help search engines find and index the releases.

The purpose of this section is to teach you how to take your traditional press release and transform it into an optimized release and then distribute it online.

DEFINITION

Optimized Press Release = Traditional Press Release + Keyword Research + Hyperlinks + Online Distribution

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Why is it important to optimize releases and distribute them online?

The Internet is growing. More and more, people are getting their news online. Almost 40 percent of people get their news online on a regular basis, compared to 13 percent 10 years ago. That means that if you want people to find your news, you should make sure it is online.

Optimizing your release will help to make sure that people who are looking online for your news can find it.

How do I start?

In the following pages, we will discuss several basic steps you can take to optimize a press release. We also provide an example. Should you wish to explore these steps in more depth, we encourage you to read this information and then review the quick tutorial that follows, which will shed even more light for you on the subject of optimized press releases and what is entailed in order to perform each step.

Tips & Tools

- Looking to get more information about any of these topics? Refer to the Tutorial section later in this chapter.

- If you need help with a specific word, check the Glossary at the end of this chapter.

How to Develop an Optimized Press Release

Step 1 Use Keyword Research

Think of keyword research as "the psychology of search." When Internet users search for information using search engines, they are asking for specific information. Therefore, you want to use "key" language in your press release.

For instance, if you are writing about conjunctivitis, but everyone is searching online for "pink eye," they may never find your information—even if it is exactly what they want.

FNS has developed some keywords that pertain to SNAP. They are available for you to use here.

You may want to build on this work by doing your own research. Performing keyword research lets you learn the words and phrases that online searchers use most often to look for your subject matter. Visit the Tutorial section to learn how to conduct your own keyword research and to obtain a list of online tools you can use.

Step 2 Modify For Online Audience

After you compile key research terms used by your Internet audience, you can identify the ideal wording to use in your release. You should insert this word or phrase into your release as much as possible.

While you want to insert your one keyword or key phrase as often as possible, there are a few areas that are more important than others when optimizing a release. These are the areas that the search engine sees as more important and uses to determine what your release is about. The key areas are:

- Headline
- Summary or subhead
- First paragraph (or first 250 words)
- Hyperlinks (covered indepth later in this section)

Tips & Tools

You want to include your keyword or key phrase about 5 times for every 100 words — but in real terms that is very hard to do. It is always more important to make sure your release reads well.

Step 3 Insert Hyperlinks

Hyperlinks should be placed where you think your reader would want more information. Often, it makes sense to hyperlink the name of your organization to your Web site the first time your organization's name appears in the release. Other than that, the placement is up to you. It is better to concentrate the bulk of your URLs towards the beginning of the release.

Internet users expect that you will include hyperlinks in your release, but you should also spell out the Web address of your main site, in case someone prints your release. One place you can include the full Web site address is at the end of your release or in your organization's boilerplate.

Step 4 Select An Online Service

You will need to choose an online service to distribute your release. There are many online vendors that can distribute your release, with different features and different prices. Therefore, you should choose the service that fits your budget and also meets your distribution needs. Some services are much more expensive, but will distribute your release to traditional wire services and online channels, such as Yahoo! News. Other options are free, but do not distribute your release to anyone. Instead, these services rely on you to send the release URL to your media and other contacts.

Some Optimized Release Distribution Options

- PRWeb www.prweb.com

- MultiVu www.multivu.com

- EON eon.businesswire.com/portal/site/eon

- PitchEngine www.pitchengine.com

- MarketWire www.marketwire.com

For additional recommendations on how to evaluate the relative success of your release, please see the Tutorial section.

Tips & Tools

- Don't use too many URLs in one sentence or short paragraph — it can make your text difficult to read and be distracting.

- You should use no more than 1 hyperlink per 100 words of your release. So, if your release is 525 words long, you should include no more than 5 hyperlinks.

Step 5 Measure Your Success

Unlike traditional wire services, most online distribution services will not provide you with a pick-up or coverage report. However, many online distribution services will provide the number of people who read or download the release directly from their Web site.

For additional recommendations on how to evaluate the relative success of your release, please see the Tutorial section.

Optimizing A Release: Example

In this section, you can see how an actual traditional release was optimized and then distributed online. In this example certain vendors and products were used, but for your release some tools may be more applicable and appropriate than others.

The above example of a traditional release might look familiar to you. When you begin to work towards distributing an online release, the first step is to review your traditional release and identify the key subject areas. You should also compile a list of what you think people who are looking for this type of information would type into an Internet search engine.

For the above example, some of the key concepts and ideas were: food stamps, SNAP, USDA, FNS, food, nutrition, Farm Bill, food assistance, EBT, etc.

Conducting Keyword Research

Next, using an online keyword research tool (for this example Keyword Discovery is used), look up all the concepts you thought of in step one. Keep track of how the terms compare to each other. For instance, in the previous example, we found that "apply for food stamps" is used almost three times more often than "applying for food stamps."

Your goal is to come up with one phrase or word that is the central subject matter of your release, and which is the most searched-for way of describing that subject. So, if the release were all about applying for food stamps, your key phrase would be "apply for food stamps."

In what follows, you can see how often some terms are searched for compared to other terms. "Nutrition," "USDA," and "food stamps" are the top three.

Select	Query	Searches
☐	nutrition	19,768
☐	usda	11,145
☐	food stamps	6,255
☐	hunger	1,931
☐	nutrition facts	1,554
☐	food nutrition	1,410
☐	diet nutrition	1,299
☐	foodstamps	1,294
☐	ebt	1,276
☐	food stamp	654
Clear Select All Select By		

"Nutrition" is searched for the most of all the terms. However, people who type "nutrition" into a search engine could be searching for a variety of things. Try typing "nutrition" into Google – the top results are nutritional guides filled with calorie information and healthy eating tips. It will not hurt to include the word "nutrition" in the release, but it should not be the main keyword, especially because "USDA" and "food stamps" are really much more relevant to this particular release.

Looking at the traditional release, you should find places in the key areas (headline, summary, and first paragraph) to insert these words. Remember, keeping your release readable and interesting is always the priority.

Insert Hyperlinks

We stressed earlier how important it is to include hyperlinks in a release. The next step is to decide where you want the hyperlink to go.

For the press release on the next page, the choices were fairly obvious. The release is about the name change of the Food Stamp Program to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), so you want to drive people to the landing page for that program. Secondly, we wanted to link to the USDA Food and Nutrition Service homepage so people can also learn more broadly about the available programs.

Ideally, you should insert your hyperlinks into the body of your press release and ensure that the text in the hyperlink includes some of your keywords. It is also a good idea to include hyperlinks early in your release both for the benefit of search engines and also so that people will see the links even if they do not scroll through your entire release.

Tips & Tools

- Spelling out acronyms is always a good idea. In this case, many people are not yet familiar with the new Federal Food Stamp Program name–the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The full name of SNAP also happens to include "Nutrition," which is a very highly searched for word.

- In the case of SNAP, it is also helpful to use "food stamps" somewhere in your release because "food stamps" is still very much in people's minds and is very likely to be searched for. Over time, as SNAP becomes more familiar to the public, this may change.

- In general, for online releases, your headline should be about 22 words, your summary or subhead should be about 2 sentences, and your release should be about 1,000 words. These lengths are ideal for search engines, and also reflect online consumers' short attention span.

Add Assets and Tag Your Release

One of the most notable features of online optimized press releases is that they can include logos, images, attached files, and video. It is always a good idea to include at least one image or logo if you can—it will make your release stand out more in the search engine results.

Images displayed alongside news results on a search engine results page

In addition to making your release stand out more in search engine results, adding assets to your release increases the depth of your offering—you have turned your press release into a complete package.

Depending on the vendor you choose to use, you may also be given the option to add "tags" or a "list of keywords" to your release. These are mechanisms to help people find and share your release. Use words from your keyword research for these fields.

Review the Final Product and Distribute

Of course you always want to review a release before you distribute it— as it is better to be safe than sorry. With some online release vendors, you can update the version of the release that resides on the vendor's site, but you can't update what has already been distributed to the media or any of the service's subscribers.

Following is a screen shot of what the optimized version of the SNAP release looked like when it was distributed online.

Tutorial: Optimized Press Releases

What are some differences between the optimized and traditional press releases?

An optimized release is often shorter than a traditional release. The optimized release has been adapted for Internet use and is easier to find by search engines. The optimized releases are written to include key search words. These key search words are words used by your audiences.

An optimized release often includes video, images, and other documents such as research papers or presentations.

Lastly, an optimized release is typically distributed by online press release distribution services, rather than by you. These services specifically target online media channels, such as Google News, Yahoo! News, and other news outlets.

What are some benefits to using an optimized press release?

Benefits include your ability to:

- Distribute your news directly to consumers in addition to media

- Use hyperlinks that will drive people to your Web site

- Use video, photos, or logos

- Enable audiences to download materials

- Take advantage of tools such as "social bookmarking" and "tagging" to allow people to easily share your news with others

- Increase traffic (Internet visitors) to your Web site

- Drive your audience to a particular location on the Internet (a specific page, for example)

- Increase the online visibility and awareness of your organization or event

- Raise the visibility of your Web page on search engine results pages

My traditional press releases already show up online, so why should I optimize a release?

People who are getting their news online use search engines. The majority of online searches are done through Google. There are other popular search engines as well, including Yahoo! and MSN.

Search engines are important because you want your news to be easily found and indexed. Search engine optimization (often referred to as "SEO") is the process that helps organize the information on a Web page to make it most easily found and recorded by search engines. Optimizing your release for search engines will make sure your information is getting to the people who are searching for it.

When I search for something using a search engine, different results appear in different areas of the page. What are the different sections, and what do they mean?

You often see two types of results when you search for something using an Internet search engine like Google. One result is called "Paid Search" or "Sponsored Links." These are often on the right side of the screen, but can also appear at the top or bottom. Regardless of where they appear, they will always be labeled as "Sponsored Links" or highlighted with different colors. Think of these as advertisements. Someone is paying money to display an ad to people who search for particular content online. This can be a very powerful tool, but not one covered in this toolkit.
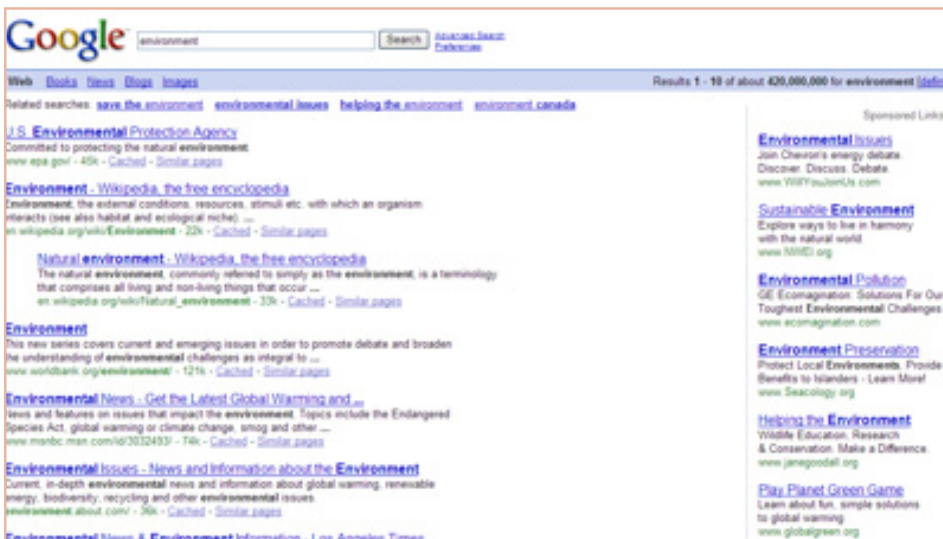
The other type of result is called "Natural Search Results" or "Organic Search Results." These results are ranked by the search engines based on a variety of factors and cannot be bought. The closer to the top of the list a result or "hit" is, the more relevant and valuable the result is to the string of words you used to search by. The goal of search engine optimization is to get your information at or near the top of the list.

Keyword Research

FNS has provided a basic list of relevant keyword research results, but you may wish or need to supplement these results with additional research of your own. To do so, follow the steps below:

1. Decide what the main subject areas are in your release.

2. Think of other ways to say those same ideas and make a list.

3. Using an online tool (see options in the sidebar), look up each word or phrase on your list.

4. Keep track of how often each term is searched for. Organize your list from most-searched-for to least-searched-for.

5. Choose the keywords that are both descriptive of your content and most popular according to the keyword research tools.

Why do I need to use a tool to tell me which words to use?

The way people search for information online is not always intuitive. For instance, "applying for food stamps," "food stamp application," and "apply for food stamps" are three phrases with almost identical meanings. In any traditional press release, you might use all three interchangeably.

However, keyword data from an online tool will tell you that "apply for food stamps" is used almost three times more often than "applying for food stamps."

Online Resources

Free Online Keyword Research Tools
Keyword Discovery
http://keyworddiscovery.com/search.html

Google Keyword Tool
https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal

Word Tracker
http://www.wordtracker.com/

Query: food stamps

Results 1 - 100 of 5964   Page: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Search Term	Total
food stamps	6225
apply for food stamps	612
florida food stamps	514
food stamps application	248
texas food stamps	238
applying for food stamps	223
food stamps florida	211
indiana food stamps	204
texas department of human services food stamps	193
apply for food stamps online	180
emergency food stamps	145
how to apply for food stamps	144
food stamps eligibility	125
application for food stamps	122
alabama food stamps	116
michigan food stamps	88
ebt food stamps	83
access florida food stamps	80
louisiana food stamps	78
how to get food stamps	75
california food stamps	74

The numbers in the "Total" column represent how often the term was searched for from a 10-percent sample of search engines over the last 12 months. Use the numbers to choose one term over another, but do not get hung up on the numbers themselves.

Hyperlinks

What is a hyperlink?

A hyperlink is a word, phrase, or image that you can click on to jump to a new document or a new section within the current document. Hyperlinks are found in nearly all Web pages, and let you click from page to page. Text hyperlinks are often blue and underlined, but don't have to be. Hyperlinks are often called just "links."

EXAMPLE

Clicking here will take you to the USDA Food and Nutrition Service home page is an example of a hyperlink. Clicking on the red text, or "hypertext," will take you to a destination URL, in this case http://www.fns.usda.gov.

Why should I include hyperlinks in my online press release?

It is critical to include hyperlinks in your online release. Not doing so is a huge missed opportunity. Hyperlinks are important because they:

- Lead readers of your release to your Web site; and

- Count as objective votes for your Web site in the eyes of search engines.

Leading readers of your release to your Web site is important if you want to increase traffic to your site, where they can gather more information and ideally become repeat visitors, as they learn to view your site as an authority.

The second point is equally important to accomplishing the goals of an optimized release. As your press release is picked up by other Web sites, the release will include the hyperlinks you've inserted. Search engines look at these hyperlinks very favorably, and having many hyperlinks pointing to your site helps your site rank higher in search engines.

Choosing a Service

There are many services that will distribute your release online at various price levels. These companies also have customer service representatives who can help you determine which service is right for you and answer any questions you might have. Here are some additional factors you should consider when choosing a service to use.

Things To Consider

1. **BILINGUAL OR LANGUAGES OTHER THAN ENGLISH** Not all vendors offer the same services. Some have very sophisticated translation and targeting options, while others have no distribution for languages other than English, although they will post the release on their site. Make sure to ask questions before selecting your service if other languages are a consideration.

2. **USE OF IMAGES, VIDEO, OR LOGOS** Most optimized release vendors let you include images and logos. Most will also let you include video—some simply require that the video is hosted on YouTube.com, while others need the actual video file to be uploaded. If a video is important, check to see which vendors include video in their fees.

3. **MEASUREMENTS** There are different levels of metrics and reporting after your release has been distributed. To learn more about ways you can supplement metrics that your release service provides, see the Measurement section of this tutorial.

4. **EXTRA FEATURES** Many services provide the option to attach downloadable files, "tags," and "social bookmarks." Tags and social bookmarks are Web 2.0 methods to flag what your release is about and make it easy to find and share.

What are the main differences between using a traditional wire service and an online optimized release service?

Where the release is distributed is one big difference—an online release should be more targeted to online news portals, online news search engines, and social media tools. This means that it is targeting the online news consumer and, in many cases, can reach the end user without ever being "picked up" (i.e., sought out by the media) in the traditional sense.

Depending on the service you use, the actual uploading and submission of the release may be different or similar to the experience you are used to from traditional wire services.

Optimized releases are also displayed alongside news stories in many news search engines—allowing you to control the headline, summary, and often the image associated with the search engine result. This control is crucial as more and more people find their news online. Search engine results pages are an increasingly significant opportunity to grab consumers.

Measuring Your Success

Unlike traditional wire services, most online distribution services will not provide you with a pick-up or coverage report. However, many online distribution services will provide the number of people who read or downloaded the release directly from their Web site.

Depending on your goal in distributing your release online, there are different steps you can take to measure how your release performed. Some suggestions are below.

GOAL

Distribute the content of your release to news outlets

HOW TO MEASURE SUCCESS

As mentioned, unlike traditional wire services you may be familiar with, most online distribution services will not provide you with a pick-up or coverage report. To measure how many online news outlets have picked up your release, try using a search engine to search for the title of your release a few days after it was sent. Two popular search engines that can be used for this include Google (www.google.com) and Yahoo! (www.yahoo.com).

In addition to searching for the title of your release, you can also search for your organization name, the name of the event or speaker you are promoting, and the central topic of your release to see if the content of the release was picked up by an outlet without the full body and title of the release.

GOAL

Distribute the content of your release to partners (in addition to news outlets)

HOW TO MEASURE SUCCESS

Using a similar process as described above, you can also see how many blogs pick up your release. The term "blog" is short for "weblog," and is a Web site that displays in chronological order the postings by one or more individuals. Blogs can be written by journalists, but are often written by the general public. Some blogs are read by many people, while others are read by fewer people.

You can search for your release using one of the many blog search tools including:

- Google Blog Search http://blogsearch.google.com/
- Technorati http://technorati.com/
- IceRocket http://www.icerocket.com/

Technorati has a system called "Authority" to tell you how important and relevant they have determined different blogs to be. The higher a blog's authority number, the more people are reading and linking to that particular blog.

GOAL

Increase traffic (Internet visitors) to your Web site

HOW TO MEASURE SUCCESS

To determine whether an online release has increased traffic to your Web site, you will need access to the traffic logs of your Web site. The person or organization who administers your Web site should be able to grant you access to these or pull information for you. You can either look for an overall increase in the number of visitors to your site in the time following the distribution of your release, or you can try to dig a bit deeper.

Most Web traffic logs should be able to tell you "Referrers" or "Referrals" to your site. This is a way of finding out where visitors to your site are coming from. If you use ABC Press Releases to distribute your release, the URL of your release will begin with www.ABCPressReleases.com, or a similar standard domain name. This allows you to search for your "Referrers" or "Referrals," which shows how many people came from that domain name, and how many clicked through from your release.

Similarly, if you know your release was picked up by www.BestNewsSource.com, you can search for that domain in your "Referrals" or "Referrers" to find out how many people came to your site from that location.

GOAL

Drive your audience to a particular location on the Internet (a specific page, for example)

HOW TO MEASURE SUCCESS

You can use the same measurements as above, especially if overall traffic to your Web site has increased. If it has, and you included the specific URL you wanted people to visit, then it is likely that people were visiting that page. Most Web analytic programs will also provide you with statistics on the most popular pages on your site, which can also tell you how many people are visiting a particular page.

If the Web page you drove people to included a survey, registration for an event, or downloadable resources, you can also look for an increase in interaction with those features.

GOAL

Increase the online visibility and awareness of your organization, news, or event

HOW TO MEASURE SUCCESS

Search for your release on the major search engines, as well as the portion of their search engines specifically dedicated to news.

You can also search for the keyword or phrase you optimized for in your release. When you type a keyword or phrase into the news searches on the immediate day or so following the distribution of your release, your release should be returned high up on the page.

Think of this as basically a billboard for your organization – even if people don't click through to your release, they have seen your headline and in most cases your subhead or summary, and sometimes even an image or logo.

GOAL

Help increase the position of your Web page on search engine results pages

HOW TO MEASURE SUCCESS

This one takes longer to achieve than the others, but issuing optimized online releases with hyperlinks to your Web site is one very important element of increasing the position of your Web site on the search engine results page.

To illustrate the importance of improving your Web site's position: 80 percent of Internet traffic begins at a search engine, according to Harris Interactive.

Getting your Web site to rank highly in search engines can take a very long time, but is worth the effort. For example, 70 percent of people will click on something on the first results page of a search engine – that is to say, on one of the first 10 results. The numbers drop significantly from there. Approximately 15 percent of people will click on the second page of results 11-20. Finally, people will click on results 21-30 on the third page only about 10 percent of the time.

Search Engine Results	Clicks
Page 1	70%
Page 2	15%
Page 3	10%
Page 4	5%

GOAL

Create a multimedia release that can live online and include video, photos, or downloadable resources

HOW TO MEASURE SUCCESS

This is more straightforward than the others. Did you include video and images in your release or downloadable materials such as white papers or presentations? If so, you have created a multimedia release. With many online optimized release services, you can update the release over time to include new images or a video from an event. This means that you can send the release URL to any contacts you have and they will have instant access to not only the text of your release, but also any additional resources you want to provide to them.

Optimized Press Release Glossary of Terms

Terms	Definition
Anchor Text	Anchor text is the part of the hyperlink that you see when you are reading a Web page, email, or document. For instance in the example Food & Nutrition Service Home Page, the words "Food & Nutrition Service Home Page" are the anchor text. Anchor text is analyzed by search engines, so it is important to use relevant keywords in your hyperlinks when possible.
Hyperlink	A hyperlink is a word, phrase, or image that you can click on to jump to a new document or a new section within the current document. Hyperlinks are found in nearly all Web pages, allowing users to click their way from page to page. Text hyperlinks are often blue and underlined, but don't have to be.
Keyword (or Key Phrase)	The one word or key phrase that is the most searched for and represents the central point of your release. You want to find the right term to use for your subject matter, so that people who are searching for relevant information online will find your content.
Keyword Research	Keyword research is the practice of researching keywords (terms) relevant to your Web site or online content and determining which are actually searched upon by search engine users to find information.
Metadata	Broadly, metadata, or meta data, is data about data. In terms of the Web and search engine optimization, metadata is descriptive text that you add to the code of a Web page to help search engines identify and index the content of that page. The three most common types of metadata on a Web page are the Title, the Description and the Keywords. While the keywords and description do not appear on the actual Web page, the Title is what shows up in the top bar of your browser when you are on a Web page, such as Food & Nutrition Service Home Page on http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns/. All three areas should include keywords determined through keyword research.
Optimized Press Release	An optimized press release conveys news or information, like a traditional release does, but it also includes language that is optimized for search engines and hyperlinks to Web pages. Optimized releases are also distributed online.
Organic Search	Also referred to as 'Natural Search,' organic search is the opposite of paid search and search engine marketing. Organic search engine results are ranked by the search engines based on a variety of factors and cannot be bought. The closer to the top of the list a result or "hit" is, the more relevant and valuable the result is to the string of words you used to search by. By utilizing search engine optimization, over time, an organization's information can improve its organic search results, and appear at or near the top of the list.
Paid Search	Paid search, or search engine marketing, is basically purchasing ads associated with keywords. This is the opposite of organic search. You will often see paid search ads on the search engine results page along with the organically derived search results.
Search Engine Crawler	A search engine crawler (also known as a Web spider, Web crawler or Web robot) is a program run by search engines that browses the Web in a methodical, automated manner and indexes content for the engine.
Search Engine Marketing	Search engine marketing (SEM) is the practice of paying a search engine to run ads associated with keywords. These are the ads that you see on a search engine results page.
Social Bookmarking	Social bookmarking is a method for Internet users to store, organize, search, and manage bookmarks of Web pages on the Internet with the help of metadata. In a social bookmarking system, users save links to Web pages that they want to remember and/or share.
Technorati Tags	Technorati tags are labels that people use to make it easier to find blog posts, photos, and videos that are related on the popular blog search engine Technorati (www.technorati.com).

Note: Trade and company names are used in this document solely to provide information. Mention of a trade or company name does not constitute a warranty or endorsement by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to the exclusion of other products or organizations not mentioned.

Proclamations

Who issues a proclamation?

Proclamations are usually issued by mayors, county commissions, governors, city commissions, State legislatures, and other public officials to recognize a local cause or achievement.

Why and when should an organization request a proclamation?

Organizations can use a proclamation to get more publicity when conducting events or outreach efforts. The timing is best around a major event or when undergoing a big media push.

How is a proclamation issued?

Your organization may submit a proclamation request. You may privately approach a mayor, State legislator, or city commissioner to sponsor your request. Provide draft language that you would like the issuing body to consider. That often helps to move the process forward. If the proclamation is to be issued at a public gathering, such as a city commission meeting, you may need to file the request a month or more in advance, depending on the rules of the issuing body.

What steps should be taken to issue a proclamation?

Once you have determined which public official(s) you would like to ask to issue a proclamation, it will be important to research whether any guidelines exist. This information can often be found on the officials' Web site, or can be obtained by calling a public affairs liaison. In many cases, you can apply for a proclamation by mail, email, or personal delivery.

What does a typical proclamation say?

The language in the proclamation should be crafted to drive home key points about your organization, your special outreach effort, and the value of SNAP. The proclamation template on the next page can provide some helpful language.

What does a typical proclamation look like?

Oftentimes, a proclamation is printed on heavy weight paper and affixed with a seal and official signatures. Your organization can proudly display it.

Proclamation Template

SNAP AWARENESS DAY/WEEK/MONTH
[TIMING TO BE PROCLAIMED]
By the [INSERT TITLE OF LOCAL OR STATE OFFICIAL…Such as Mayor of/Governor] of
[INSERT CITY/TOWN/STATE]

A PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the cornerstone of the Federal nutrition assistance safety net, providing more than 8.2 million households and 21 million low-income Americans with nutrition assistance;

WHEREAS, hunger is a problem that affects families and individuals, including children and the elderly;

WHEREAS almost half of those eligible for SNAP benefits are currently not receiving the benefits they need, and [INSERT STATE/LOCAL STATISTIC, IF POSSIBLE];

WHEREAS, each $5 in new Federal SNAP benefits generates nearly double that in economic activity;

WHEREAS, SNAP is modern, with benefits now delivered via electronic (EBT) cards;

WHEREAS, food retailers who accept SNAP EBT cards are important partners fighting hunger in our community;

WHEREAS, the United States Department of Agriculture and the State of [INSERT NAME OF STATE] are working to simplify the SNAP application process;

WHEREAS, the STATE/CITY/TOWN of [INSERT NAME] is participating in SNAP's national outreach effort by conducting an awareness effort to help constituents determine potential eligibility and inform them on how to apply;

NOW, THEREFORE, I [INSERT OFFICIAL'S NAME AND TITLE] do hereby proclaim [TIMING – DAY, WEEK, MONTH] [SPECIFIC DATE as "SNAP Awareness Day/Week/Month" and call upon the community and partner organizations to celebrate with appropriate ceremonies to acknowledge these efforts.

In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand on this [INSERT DAY AND MONTH, YEAR]

_____

Signature of Official

The Editorial Section

What is the editorial section?

The editorial section is the section of the paper in which the editors of the paper and others express their opinions on important issues facing the community. This section of the newspaper is typically well read by key community leaders and decision-makers who can help ensure the success of your efforts. Below are several tips for getting your messages and information on these pages. Keep in mind that the more you can tie your outreach efforts in to local happenings, the greater the likelihood of getting published.

What is a letter to the editor?

Letters to the editor are written by readers in response to an article that appeared within the past few days and submitted for publication in the newspaper. Keep on top of local news coverage around hunger, poverty, or families in need. This type of news coverage provides an opportunity for you to respond with helpful information.

What if no one contacts me about my letter to the editor?

If you have sent your letter to the editor and have not heard anything within a week, make a follow up call to check on its status. Be aware that editors receive hundreds of letters and may not immediately respond. A letter to the editor on a specific topic has a better chance of being published if more than one person or group responds. This is a good time to rally your partners and ask them to write to the paper as well; each letter, however, should be individually drafted. Form letters are usually ignored.

What is an opinion-editorial (op-ed)?

An op-ed is an article written by someone expressing their opinion about an important issue. Op-eds are submitted by community members. Editors decide which to print in the paper. Op-eds are an excellent forum to let people know about the benefits of SNAP because they allow you to share your point of view with much greater detail and persuasion than a short letter will permit.

What if no one contacts me about my op-ed?

Due to limited space, not every op-ed that is submitted can be printed. Most op-ed editors will respond to your submission within a week or two. If you have not heard back in that time frame, or if your piece is particularly time-sensitive, it is perfectly acceptable to call and ask about its status.

Tips & Tools

Tips to Write a Letter to the Editor

- Check out the newspaper's guidelines for publishing letters to the editor, usually printed on the editorial page itself.

- Begin by referring to the article to which you're responding, including its title and the date it appeared in print.

- Resist the urge to say everything you know. Keep your letter concise and make one clear point.

Tips & Tools

Tips to Get An Op-Ed Published

- Learn the rules. Research the newspapers' specific rules about submissions, such as word count, before you start writing. This information may be posted on the outlet's Web site.

- Make contact. Call the editorial page editors of the newspapers and talk to them about your column idea. They may have ideas about the direction you are taking that will increase the likelihood of being published.

- Use a hook. Include a "hook" or catchy aspect in your piece. Has there recently been a news story about hunger that would make an op-ed on SNAP timely? Perhaps there is new data on local poverty rates, or a special event coming up that will provide a hook.

- Use examples. Capture the reader's interest with illustrations, anecdotes, and personal stories. These persuasive tools help explain complicated issues and bring the human element to your op-ed.

- Stick to facts and solid arguments. Avoid alienating readers with inflammatory or accusatory remarks.

- Make a specific recommendation. State your opinion on the issue.

- Make a unique point. Offer a new point of view even if the newspaper itself editorialized recently about hunger or poverty.

- End with a bang. Summarize your argument and leave readers with information, advice, or an idea they or the community can act on, such as a challenge to increase enrollment of their neighbors and family members who are eligible.

What is an editorial board meeting?

Most newspapers have editorial boards who determine the position that the newspaper will take in its printed editorials. These representatives from the newspaper meet regularly to consider those positions. Meeting with this board as a group or with individual board members allows you to influence editorial coverage of hunger and SNAP issues. As a result of an editorial board meeting, a reporter may be assigned to cover the issue, or an editorial may appear in the paper.

Also consider joining an advisory board, county board, or nutrition board, if one exists in your community. Look to this group of individuals to present hunger and other related topics to the editorial board. There is a chance there will be no immediate outcome, but the meeting will introduce you and your partners to influential individuals at the paper, and position you as a knowledgeable source about SNAP. These are important relationships to cultivate, so follow up with new information from time to time.

Pointers to Set Up an Editorial Board Meeting With a Newspaper

- **Plan your timing.** You'll grab a few minutes of a board member's precious time in the same way that you'll get the attention of a beat reporter: a strong peg to a current news story.

- **Make an appointment.** Call the newspaper and ask who organizes editorial board meetings. In most instances, an assistant will either connect you directly to a board member or ask you to send a letter or email outlining your request. Most papers reserve regular hours for the board to meet, generally between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. The meetings are usually held in a small conference room at the newspaper's offices.

- **Assemble a team.** Rally your partners. Assemble a diverse group to meet with the editorial board, with each person having different perspectives and experiences related to SNAP benefits and hunger. Participants might include the head of a local food bank, a local grocer, and an elected official. Let the newspaper know ahead of time whom you are bringing.

- **Rehearse your presentation.** Designate one person to act as the spokesperson and introduce the issue (e.g., "Many people go hungry unnecessarily and aren't receiving the SNAP benefits they need. When people use SNAP benefits, everyone in the community wins."). Limit your remarks to 15 or 20 minutes.

- **Leave written information behind.** After the presentation, the members of the editorial board generally ask questions (see the Q&A in the Introduction Section for helpful hints). Be sure to leave written information about your organization, hunger, how SNAP benefits can help and their positive impact on your community, etc.

Purpose Of Community Calendar Listings

Newspapers, radio and TV stations, and local access/community cable TV channels often have time or space set aside for a calendar listing of public events happening in and around a city or State. This publicity is free and easy to obtain.

Most media outlets that have a calendar section assign a specific staff member — usually a calendar editor — to receive submissions and compile the listings.

Respect the media outlet's deadlines. A general rule of thumb is to submit listing information a few weeks in advance; however, it is best to contact the specific outlet to determine timing and preferences (fax, email, U.S. mail) for receiving calendar information. This is also a perfect opportunity to inquire whether or not the outlet accepts corresponding images and, if so, what the preferred format is (hard copy, JPEG, TIF) and the resolution or image size needed.

If you are submitting a calendar listing by U.S. mail, it is recommended that you send a cover letter and listing two to three weeks before the event date. Remember to put your letter on your organization's letterhead; if you are submitting an image along with your letter, be sure to include a sample caption.

A CALENDAR LISTING SHOULD CONTAIN

- Who
- What
- Where
- When
- Contact name and phone number
- Cost, if any

Community Calendar Listing Template

[DATE]

Dear Community Calendar Editor,

Too many low-income individuals and families in [NAME OF STATE/CITY/TOWN] are not getting
the food they need. In fact, [X NUMBER] low-income people in our community are at risk for hunger
and poor nutrition, and many of these are children. Studies indicate that, nationally,
about 50 percent of those eligible for SNAP benefits are not getting the benefits they need.
Here in [NAME OF STATE/CITY/TOWN], [INSERT STATE/LOCAL STATISTIC, IF POSSIBLE].

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the cornerstone of the Federal nutrition
assistance safety net. Today, the program provides more than 8.2 million households and 21 million
low-income Americans with nutrition assistance.

To increase enrollment at the [STATE/LOCAL] level, [NAME OF ORGANIZATION] has embarked on
a major outreach effort to help low-income individuals and families learn about their eligibility for
SNAP benefits and how to apply. On [DATE AND TIME], [NAME OF ORGANIZATION] will be [EVENT
INFORMATION DETAILS] at [LOCATION].

Please include the following notice in your community calendar listing. If you have any questions
about our program, please contact me at [PHONE NUMBER].

Thank you.

[CONTACT NAME]
[NAME OF ORGANIZATION]

Social Media

This chapter will help you understand social media and how to work it into your communications activities. Sidebar information and a full glossary define and explain commonly used social media terms.

Section I. What Is Social Media?

Social media describes online tools used to share and publish opinions, insights, experiences, and perspectives and include blogs, message boards, podcasts, wiki sites, and vlogs. Messages can be delivered via text, images, audio, and video. Social media tools also allow users to respond to what they have read, listened to, or watched by posting comments that all other readers can see.

These days, almost everyone has access to the Web, either at work, at home, or on the go through a mobile device. Even though low-income individuals or families may not have easy access to a computer, many increasingly connect to the Web through their mobile phones. Since the Web and social media tools are so accessible to the public, it is important to understand how to use these tools to reach your audience(s).

📖 Social Media Glossary A—E

Application or app
A small program downloaded and run on a computer desktop, mobile device, or social network that is designed to help the user perform a specific task.

Blog (also Web log)
A journal-style Web site on which an individual or group enters text, called a "post," resulting in a running conversation displayed in reverse chronological order.

Consumer-generated content
Digital content that is produced by self-publishers and sometimes picked up or referenced in traditional media.

Digital communications
Myriad of outbound communications tactics that leverage digital technology to deliver messages: email, video, text messaging, online advertising, optimized press releases, podcasts, videos, etc.

Digital news room (also online pressroom)
A robust source of news and media content such as news releases, contacts, background information, and digital media assets including photos, graphics, audio, video, and multimedia content. Often incorporated into an organization's Web site.

Email marketing
A form of direct marketing that uses emails to deliver a message and promote a service or product to your target audience.

How is social media different from traditional forms of media?

Traditional communications such as television, newspaper, and radio go one way, from the producer to a general audience. See the comparison with social media below.

Traditional Media	Social Media
Publisher or broadcaster is in control	Audience is in control
One way communication—no conversation	Two-way communication—open dialogue
Organization creates the content	Users can create or help generate content

Is social media and social marketing the same?

Social marketing is an approach to communicating that builds awareness about a social issue and works to change people's behaviors or attitudes and to improve the lives of individuals and communities. Examples include programs to raise money for charity or to increase awareness of a health issue. Social media can be used as part of a social marketing program—for example, an organizational Facebook page that helps promote a fundraising event. However, social marketing does not imply the use of social media.

What are the benefits and limitations of using social media?

Engaging the public and/or media brings both benefits and limitations. With social media, it's important to understand that these tools are powered by people; as a result, the tools require time and energy to manage (remember, this is a two-way conversation). However, the time invested will help form a relationship between SNAP and your audience and create a deeper connection with the community you serve.

Benefits and limitations of social media can be summarized as follows:

Benefits	*Challenges*
Open connections and receive feedback from the communities you serve	Takes time to manage—to learn and develop relationships
Low cost; many tools are free	Not always "on message"—can sometimes be too informal
Flexible and fun—help to generate new ideas	Uncontrolled—you may receive negative feedback
Allow for creativity and experimentation	Takes time to refresh content
Increase likelihood your site will be found in search engines	Can lead to information overload

What are some social media trends?

Social media is popular because it helps people find and connect with each other in new and easy ways. With social media, you can connect virtually with people all around the world who share the same goals, face the same issues, and experience the same challenges.

People are increasingly using search engines such as Google, Yahoo!, or Bing to find what they need, when they need it. It's important that your information appear on the first page of search results; a first-page landing, particularly on Google, can carry a similar prestige and visibility to being mentioned on the front page of The New York Times.

How do you get on the first page? The more links you have to your Web site from other well-trafficked sites, the more credible your Web site is and the higher your search engine rank or position will be.

Social Media Glossary F—P

Facebook
A popular global social network where individuals may publish and maintain profiles and connect with other users. Businesses, organizations, and ideas may also publish and maintain special profiles.

Influencer
An active and well-connected individual online. Usually, these individuals have large followings and reach a lot of people, but they can also be highly influential in molding the views of a specific audience or group of audiences you want to reach.

Microblogging
A form of online publishing that allows users to send very brief text updates and messages to a network of subscribers. These messages can be submitted by a variety of means, including text messaging, instant messaging, email, or the Web. Twitter is an example.

Mobile marketing
A form of marketing and communicating through cell phones and mobile devices. Can be used to deliver text messages, email, or applications to download.

Online monitoring
Tracking of online coverage and conversation, usually for reporting or responding purposes.

Podcast
Audio recording that is hosted on a Web page and accessible for individual downloads.

Tips & Tools

Adding social media tools to your SNAP outreach program will create more links back to your site. When your link shows up on a search engine's front page, you're much more likely to drive visitors to your content and create opportunities for dialogue.

Important Do's and Don'ts For Using Social Media

DO:

- Define your goals. Always think first before starting to use social media. Be sure that using the tool will help you to achieve the results that you want.

- Participate actively. Contribute constructive comments and updates. You will gain trust and others will appreciate you.

- Be flexible. Social media tools are often upgraded, so stay flexible and up-to-date on what's current.

- Be yourself! Social media allow us to show our personalities—in fact, doing so is welcomed and appreciated.

- Provide value. Carefully consider everything you publish. How does this help the people that your organization serves? If you discover that it is not helpful, try to find a way to improve it.

- Keep a consistent voice. If you are using more than one social media tool or channel, be consistent to maintain the same tone and personality.

- Create a response plan. It is very important to respond as quickly as possible. If you do not, the conversation can die or others will drop it out of boredom. However, it is vital to be prepared. Develop a plan to prepare for negative situations that may affect your organization online, and include suggested guidance for responding.

DON'T:

- Forget that social media is powered by real people. Be yourself and avoid sounding overly scripted.

- Ignore your community. If your organization has a page or group in a social network, be sure to keep the content fresh. Respond to people quickly if they reach out to you.

- Lose track of the real world. Social media tools might be great, but nothing will ever come close to live interaction with real people.

- Forget to monitor. Keeping track of news about your organization and issue will allow you to provide more relevant content and information to the people who need it most.

- Spam! Be sure that updates and messages to others online are relevant and timely. If they are not, you may lose trust if those on the receiving end consider them spam.

- Try to do too much too fast. Remember, every organization is different. Choose the tools that make the most sense for your organization. With time, and after evaluating what is likely to be effective and practical, more tools can be folded into the mix.

- Engage in dishonest behavior online. Do not lie, scam, or plagiarize other content that you find online. If you would like to use a sentence of two of someone else's blog post in a Twitter update or on your organization's blog, be sure to cite the reference with a link.

Section II. Organizations and Social Media

Why should organizations use social media tools to promote SNAP?

Social media tools provide everyday people with a platform to share ideas and opinions—in short, everyone who wants to say something can now be heard.

A quick online search shows why it's important for organizations to embrace social media. A Google search for "food stamps" gets thousands of results. People are searching and commenting about SNAP with or without your input. Helping them locate local, credible SNAP information means you need to show up in their search results. Using social media tools allows you to create conversations as well as locate and join existing ones.

Can you commit to social media success?

Your organization may not be ready to use social media if you're unable to commit to the following guiding principles ... and that's OK. The most important thing to do now is to think about how social media might help now or in the future.

Section III. Social Media Strategy

How do you create a social media strategy?

As with public relations or marketing, it's important to develop a strategy before using social media tools. Ask the following questions to get started:

- Who is my audience?
- How do they access the Internet? From home, the library, or mobile?
- Do they use social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter?
- What are they interested in learning more about?
- How can we help them make more informed decisions?
- Am I willing to have an open dialogue and risk negative feedback?
- Am I able to respond quickly to maintain the dialogue?
- How can I set up my social media platforms in a way that will allow the most effective use of our own time?
- Are other organizations in my community using social media? How can we partner and work together?

Asking these questions in advance will not only keep you focused and organized, but also will ensure that you are spending your resources wisely.

Tips & Tools

Guiding Principles for Social Media Success

- Provide value to audiences with helpful, interesting, relevant, and timely information.
- Create two-way communication.
- Select the best channels for reaching the target audience based on where conversations are already happening.
- Support the organization's mission with social media activities that make the most sense for the organization and audience.
- Make it a priority across the organization and not just for one person or group.
- Give all your social media channels a consistent voice and look.

The following are additional points and examples to consider when using social media:

The best way to get started is to look at ways other community organizations use social media, while also understanding the challenges they may face.

In Arizona, a Nutrition Network Program Manager uses the agency's Web site as the primary hub for information. The Web site includes a monthly newsletter, tips for parents, and recipes. The manager is planning to use Twitter to share recipes. In the future, the agency plans to use Facebook as a place to host conversations about nutrition education and to provide a forum for its partners. While this particular nutritionist sees the value of social media, she is also concerned about negative comments and Facebook wall posts.

In Oregon, the Nutrition Education Program Coordinator used Facebook on a trial basis to support a specific campaign, and based on that success plans to take the program statewide. Her main reason for using social media is to connect program participants with one another and with program staff. Her biggest hurdle is identifying staff who have enough time to take on this project.

Social Media Glossary R—S

RSS
Acronym for Really Simple Syndication. RSS "readers" allow Web users to easily "feed out" or "pull in," by way of subscription, selected Web content to or from another Web property.

RSS reader
Also called a news aggregator; allows users to electronically capture and display in a central location information and content from a variety of online media outlets, including e-zines, Web sites, and blogs using RSS feeds. Example: Google Reader.

Social bookmarking
A popular method of classifying, sharing, and storing electronic content to facilitate easy sorting or search. The bookmarks, or tags, help users identify relevant content as well as rank content based on the number of viewers, relevance, etc. Example: Delicious.

Social media
Online tools used to share and publish opinions, insights, experiences, and perspectives; include blogs, message boards, podcasts, wiki sites, and vlogs. Messages can be delivered via text, images, audio, and video. Social media tools also allow readers to respond to what they have read, listened to, or watched by posting comments that all other readers can see.

Social media news release (SMNR)
Also new media release or social media press release. Traditional press release content that is repurposed for optimal online visibility in Web search and encourages Web-user interaction. Key messages are "chunked" into shorter bits and include text links to relevant content, tags (keywords), multimedia, and other assets that encourage user dialogue and content sharing.

Social networking site (also social network)
Web site featuring focused, often user-generated content of interest to site visitors who openly converse; includes personal profiles, blogs, discussion groups, photos, music, and videos. Examples: Facebook, LinkedIn.

When you are ready to start planning your social media program, consider the following:

Audience

As with any marketing effort, the first step is to identify the audiences you need to reach and how they use social media. If you are considering a Facebook profile, search to see if anyone is talking about your organization or issue on Facebook and identify those groups or individuals before you set up an organizational presence. You will need a Facebook account to do this. If you don't have one, you can assign a staff member to set one up.

If you are considering a blog, find out who the key bloggers are in your subject area. You can do this by doing a Google blog search (http://www.google.com/blogsearch). This will allow you to observe what your audience is saying, and will help you plan for content down the road. It is also helpful to see how other organizations like yours use social media.

Objectives

Be specific and think about what you want to accomplish:

- Increase awareness about SNAP?

- Encourage consumers who are not participating in SNAP to use the prescreening tool?

- Share low-cost, healthy recipes with SNAP participants?

Setting a social media objective is not about blasting your message out to a mass audience. It is about reaching out to targeted influential audience members, developing relationships, and having a conversation.

Staff Roles

Who is going to implement your social media strategy within your organization? Whether you hire someone new or assign the role to a current staff member or volunteer, that person should be comfortable using the tools, be passionate about your organization's programs, and should enjoy interacting with other people.

Policy

Social media requires a mix of authenticity, openness, and transparency, making it important to have an upfront understanding of what your staff will and will not do with social media tools. The process of creating a policy can also lead to a deeper understanding of the benefits and value of social media. The policy you set up should be written down and should be prepared with the advice of your organization's legal counsel.

This policy will need to include guidelines and procedures on a number of issues.

⚒ Tips & Tools

If your organization will be setting up profiles on social networking sites, you will need guidelines to address how staff members identify themselves as members of your organization. In addition, the policy will need to cover guidelines for responding to negative comments on a blog or online forum, including what your organization will do when a fan or a critic sets up a page on Facebook that misrepresents your message, logo, or anything else affiliated with your brand, including pictures and videos.

Time Commitments

A social media program requires an investment in time more than maintenance, especially if you are learning as you go. But as you become more familiar with the tool and the workflow, it will be less time-consuming.

It is crucial to maintain any conversation that you start, and to respond quickly to comments from others. Letting a conversation lag or lapse will cause visitors to leave, and some may not return. Your social media plan needs ongoing, consistent monitoring.

Section IV. Social Media Tactics and Tools

Below here is a list of helpful media and Web sites so you can stay current on new tools and technology.

As new tools arrive and old tools are updated frequently, it's important to stay current on what's new in social media. Some helpful Web sites and recommended blogs to read regularly include:

- **Mashable**: Updated throughout the day, Mashable (http://www. mashable.com) is the Web's leading resource on social media news and tools.

- **Read Write Web**: Another resource for news and tools, Read Write Web (http://www.readwriteweb.com) also provides helpful tips on how to use social media.

- **Beth's Blog**: Written by nonprofit social media guru Beth Kanter, Beth's Blog (http://beth.typepad.com) is written especially for nonprofits to learn how to use social media.

- **Word of Mouth Marketing Association**: An organization for agencies and companies that regularly work in the social media space, WOMMA (http://www.womma.org) provides readers and members with helpful news and tips, in addition to a code of ethics for communications and marketing professionals on how to connect with their audiences through social media.

- **Marketing Profs Daily Fix Blog**: A group blog written by many well-known social media experts, the Daily Fix (http://www.mpdailyfix. com) blog provides helpful examples of how companies and organizations successfully use social media.

- **Social Media Monitoring Tools**: The following are easy-to-use sites and tools for real-time social media search, analysis, and, in some cases, email alerts.) http://www.socialmention.com; http://www.howsociable.com)

- **Social Media Policies Wiki**: A helpful collection of sample social media policies from a wide range of organizations and companies (wiki. altimetergroup.com).

Social Media Glossary T—Z

Tags
Keywords or phrases assigned to Web content, such as blog posts, wiki entries, photos, podcasts, etc., to facilitate easy organization, called indexing and searching.

Twitter
Free social networking and microblogging service that allows users to send and read other users' updates (tweets), which are text-based posts of up to 140 characters. Updates are displayed on the user's profile page and delivered to other users who have signed up to receive them.

Virtual world
Computer-based, simulated environment in which users access a downloadable program that lets them interact with one other via avatars, i.e., two- or three-dimensional graphical representations of real-world life forms. Example: Second Life.

Vlog
A blog consisting of video posts, accessible for individual downloads using "pull" technology such as RSS feeds and video-capable MP3 players.

Web 2.0
A term coined to loosely describe Web-based services such as blogs, wiki sites, and social networks that emphasize online collaboration and content-sharing among users.

Widget
A "mini-Web page" or a piece of content that you can "snag" and then embed in various personal Web sites. Distribution usually includes tools that allow users to easily port or grab code to embed the widget across their own sites and social network profiles. For example, a widget could be a graphical display of your most recent tweets on Twitter or of your Facebook fans and posts. Widgets are typically embedded in the sidebar of blogs.

Wiki
A Web environment that allows visitors to openly edit the content, used primarily for collaborative content development and publishing. Example: Wikipedia.

What are social media outreach tactics?

Like public relations or marketing, many channels and tactics can be used to deliver messages via social media. Social media programs always begin with listening. What is your audience saying? What does it need and how can you help? The main tactics for executing a social media strategy are listening, participating, sharing your story, creating community, and generating online coverage. The following describes several tactics, along with tools to achieve them.

Listening

These tools help you find conversations that are important to your organization and issues, good or bad. They help you determine who is talking about you and how you can best respond.

- **Google Alerts**: Google Alerts (http://www.google.com/alerts) are email updates of the latest relevant Google results from news sites and blogs based on a search term or topic. You can subscribe through email and Really Simple Syndication (RSS). RSS allows you to "pull in" relevant content via a subscription service. Google Alerts help you monitor a news story or issue, keep current with your industry, and track who is writing about you and your organization.

- **Technorati**: Technorati (http://www.technorati.com) is a search engine just for blogs. Technorati tracks "blog reactions" or links to blogs. Search for your organization or issue on Technorati, and subscribe to RSS alerts—that way, when someone blogs about your program, you will know about it.

- **Twitter Search**: Twitter is a social network, specifically known as microblogging. This form of online publishing allows you to send very brief updates and messages (maximum 140 characters) to a network of subscribers. Twitter conversations happen fast, and the easiest way to track them is to use the Twitter search field (http://www.search.twitter.com) to locate instances where your organization is mentioned. You can also use http://www.tweetdeck.com or http://www.hootsuite.com to monitor Twitter users and keywords.

- **RSS Reader**: Also called a news aggregator, this allows you to capture relevant copy efficiently and in one place to read when you can. Rather than visiting 20 different blogs every morning, you can have all new posts delivered straight to your RSS reader. Bloglines, Google Reader, and NetVibes are popular RSS readers; review a few and use the reader you like best.

[1]Google Reader

Participating on Twitter and Blogs

Listening will naturally lead to joining the conversation.

- **Twitter**: Once you've listened a while on Twitter, it is time to join and engage! First, you will need to set up your account. The social media blog Mashable has a great step-by-step guide on how to get started and use Twitter: http://mashable.com/guidebook/twitter. Remember, having a Twitter presence requires making a commitment. If you are unsure of the time and resources, remain in listening mode until you are ready. You can always address questions and concerns you discover on Twitter on other platforms, such as directly through the email provided on the user's Web site, through a blog, or on Facebook.

[2] New York City Food Bank Twitter Page

- **Comment on blogs**: If you are using Google News Alerts, chances are you will receive an alert to a post or story that directly names your organization. In situations where you want to respond, it's important to know when to comment and when not to engage with an online response.

  If a blog post or comment is negative, think about your response before answering. Ask yourself, "Will my comment help solve the problem? Will my comment help improve my organization's relationship with this individual?" If the answers are yes, proceed with the comment, especially if you are responding to inaccurate information in the blog post. If not, reconsider your approach based on expected outcome and whether the blog is widely read by your audience.

  Whether responding to a positive or a negative post, be sure to identify who you are and who you work for. Include a link to your organization's Web site or blog, if you have one. This is called transparency, and it is very important as you represent your organization both online and offline.

Sharing Your Story

The next step is to *share* your story using social media. You can do this through blogging, podcasting, sharing photos on Flickr or videos on YouTube, or any number of other social media tools. It is very important for you to determine which tool or combination of tools is the best fit for your organization. The challenging part of sharing your story, though, is getting viewers, readers, and listeners to pass along your story to others!

- **Blogs**: Blogs are a great way to quickly and easily publish and share your organization's most recent news and updates all in one convenient location.

  Requirements:

  - Time commitment
  - Editorial calendar: a plan for content month-by-month based on topics, seasons, and issues or questions of interest to your audience
  - Available resources: technical, content, and staffing

[3] USDA Blog

- **Flickr**: Flickr is a popular photo-sharing site that allows you to upload, store, organize, and share images with everyone or just a group. You could use Flickr to share photos of a recent SNAP event, seminar, or important meeting. Additionally, you may also create photo pools in Flickr, which allow you to invite members of a Flickr group to contribute images to the pool. This can be especially helpful if a large group is contributing content for a campaign, program, or event.

⚒ Tips & Tools

How to Approach Social Media
Social media is not "one size fits all." Each organization's approach will be different because every organization has different needs, missions, resources, and culture.

⚒ Tips & Tools

Always ask for permission before posting photos of people online, and follow your organization's policy in the event signed permission forms are needed.
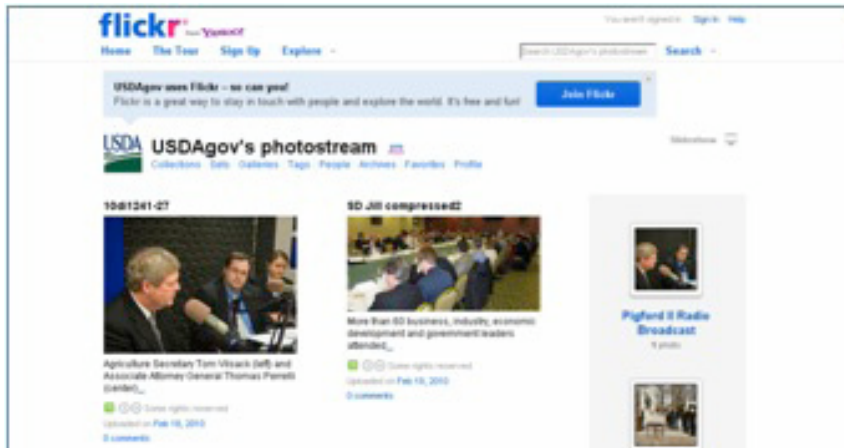
[4] USDA Flickr Page

- **YouTube**: With YouTube, you can create an online channel to post and share your organization's videos. YouTube also has a helpful guide designed especially for nonprofits (http://www.youtube.com/t/ngo_tips). Try recording an interview with your colleagues or post a short video highlight of an event. Once you post the video, let people know it's there through other communications channels. Partner with like-minded groups by subscribing to their YouTube channels and encourage them to subscribe to yours. Be sure to tag your videos appropriately and accurately so viewers are able to find them when they are searching. And again, be sure to keep privacy in mind and get permission before posting.

[5] Feeding America YouTube Channel

- **Podcasts**: A podcast is an online audio recording that can be downloaded to an iPod or streamed straight from a Web site or blog. Podcasts are a great way to capture an interview of your customers or leadership that can then be distributed using social media. Podcasts can be created using software or free Web applications like http://www.blogtalkradio.com. BlogTalkRadio lets you record, broadcast, archive, and share your podcasts online.

[6] Project Bread Podcasts

- **Twitter**: For those with less time to create content but who still have a lot to say, Twitter is a great platform from which to share short updates with your audiences—including journalists, who often search Twitter to find leads, information, and resources.

[7] Capital Area Food Bank Twitter

Creating Community

Social networking tools connect people, regardless of location, and can build a community around your issue or organization. Once you have an online community, you can engage people and inspire them to take action. Many social networks provide users with personal profiles that they create and control.

To keep a community growing and engaged, it is important to keep it updated with new content and information. You may also want to ask your community members what they would like to see on the social network from your organization. Keep the content relevant and fresh, and don't be afraid to experiment. Post a video you think is entertaining and related to your issue, or share a link to a news story that relates to your issue.

Popular social networks and tools include:

*   **Facebook**: Perhaps the most popular of all social networks, Facebook (http://www.facebook.com) gives organizations the opportunity to create Fan Pages or Groups where people can gather and share information. Fan Pages are most often used by brands and organizations, whereas Groups are created around events or issues. Facebook has a helpful guide for organizations on creating a Facebook Fan Page: http://www.facebook.com/facebookpages?v=box_3#!/advertising/?pages. A guide for those interested in a Facebook Group can be found here: http://www.facebook.com/help/#!/help/?page=414.

[8] USDA Facebook Fan Page

- **LinkedIn**: Used most frequently for job searching and professional networking, LinkedIn (http://www.linkedin.com) allows users to create profiles that display work history and experience. They can also connect to others by joining a group or connecting with employers, creating groups about issues or skills, or creating groups for like-minded professionals. For example, you could create a group for people who work in hunger prevention or advocacy.
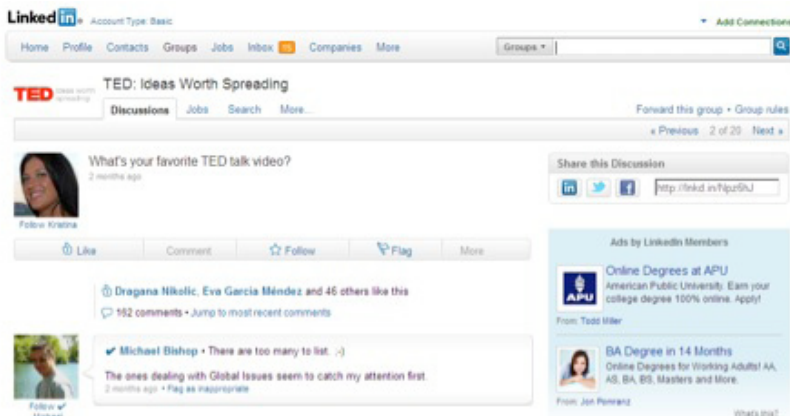
[9] LinkedIn Group Example

- **BigTent**: A free social network development program, BigTent (http://www.bigtent.com) is a tool that allows you to create your own social network for free. With the easy-to-use platform, you can create your own network around an organization, issue, or group. You can set it up so that it is open to anyone, or completely private. Members have their own profiles and can connect with others on those profiles or in group areas, such as discussion boards. When considering BigTent or any other community platform, it's important to think carefully about whether or not you need to create your own social network or use one that already exists, like Facebook. When you are conducting your needs assessment, ask your community members what they would prefer and think about how each social network option might serve them. You might also check with potential partners and determine whether presenting yourselves online as a coalition would be more beneficial.
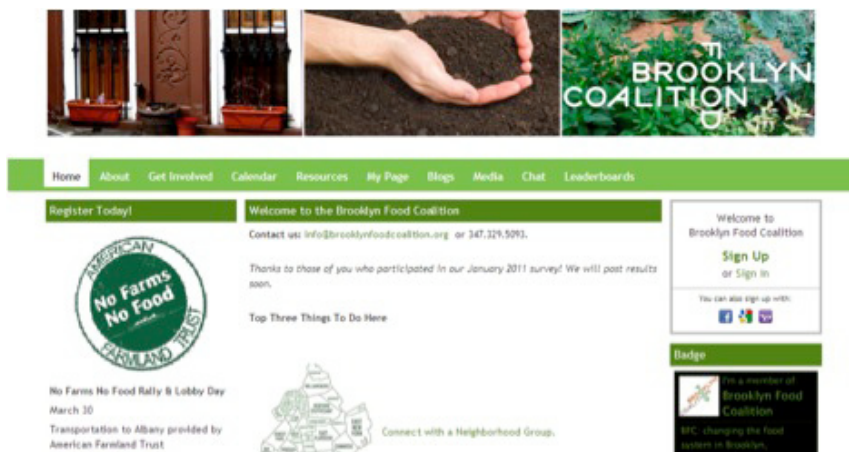
[10] Brooklyn Food Coalition Ning Profile

Generating Online Coverage

Sometimes it's not enough to share information through social media and social networks and hope that the "right" people find it. To truly engage the right audience, it might be necessary to connect directly through additional outreach.

Key to this type of outreach is the development of relationships with digital publishers and influencers; these include Web site editors, bloggers, online community leaders, and, in some cases, traditional journalists who also publish online.

Outreach to online publishers is similar to media relations, but is conducted exclusively within email. Online influencers differ from traditional media contacts in that many are not trained journalists. As a result, their needs, expectations, and approaches to content are different.

Successful online outreach relies on two things:

- **Content that is tailored and unique to each target.** Unlike traditional reporters who do their own reporting and tap their own sources, online targets are open to having most of the work done for them in advance. This gives you the opportunity to assemble your own information and deliver it more directly.

  Digital targets like content such as:

  - Pre-drafted Q&As, which they can easily post on their sites

  - Q&A via email, which they present as "interviews"

  - Video interviews and other visual content

  - Exclusive images and graphics

- **An official spokesperson or well-regarded observer (someone whose information and experiences relate to the audience).** For instance, if you want to connect with an online publisher who writes about parenting and child care, it is important to identify someone from your organization who has a connection to parenting and/or understands child care issues. This may not always be a senior-level person; just be sure that whomever you choose is comfortable communicating in this new space.

Step 1 Research

Based on your audience and content, research will help you find the right people to connect with online. A longer list isn't always better; instead, focus on finding the right targets.

Step 2 Reach Out

Once you've identified the right influencers, look for a way to get in touch. Most online outreach is conducted through email, so make sure you have correct and current email addresses. Also, be sure to look for any preferences as to how they like to be contacted or "pitched" on their Web sites. Many online publishers state their preferences or indicate "PR-friendly" status, meaning you have the green light to get in touch. Here are a few suggestions for reaching out:

- **Be brief in your email.** Explain exactly why your message is important to them and to their readers, and provide them with links to content (no attached files) and additional resources.

- **Provide contact information.** Be sure to give them your name and other pertinent contact information. Provide them with a brief description of your organization.

- **Avoid jargon.** With online outreach, there is no need to insert "buzz words" or clever language. Be yourself!

Step 3 Follow Up

After you initially email your contact list, feel free to send a follow-up note after a few days. If you don't hear back, that's okay. Your contact may be busy or think your message wasn't an exact fit for his or her readers. However, if you do hear back, be sure to provide additional information and promptly answer any questions. Finally, if your information is posted, thank them. Keep in touch if you have relevant new content.

How does social media fit into current SNAP outreach and promotional efforts?

Using social media requires strategy, planning, and integration with other communications activities. Social media can be particularly powerful when combined with traditional forms of outreach, communication, and marketing. Just be sure to consider carefully how these tools help you reach your communications goals.

- When **drafting a press release** for traditional media, make it appealing to bloggers and online publishers by adding social media-friendly and shareable content, such as links to videos and images relating to the release. For example, see how the software company Cisco incorporates social media content into its press releases and announcements: http://newsroom.cisco.com/dlls/index.html

- When **scanning newspapers for coverage** about your issue or organization, use Google or another search engine, like Yahoo! or Bing, to find blogs and Web sites that are also writing about your issue and/or organization. Google provides some good tips here: http://www.google.com/support/websearch/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=134479

Tips & Tools

Think of social media as ingredients that can be added to the larger mix of communication activities that you already carry out (e.g., distributing press releases, sending a newsletter to your partners and customers, pitching television or newspaper reporters, etc.).

- When **pitching TV or newspaper reporters** about your organization's programs, consider adding a relevant local blogger to your list. Try typing the name of your city into a search engine along with the word "blog" to see what comes up. For example, a search for "Kansas City blog" produces a number of potential bloggers to connect with in the Kansas City area. Just be sure to read each blog very carefully to determine whether the blogger will be interested in your content and in your organization. Once you find a blog that you think would appreciate your information, scan the blog again to see who the blogger reads and who the blogger links to, as this may provide additional local bloggers for you to consider in your outreach.

- If you regularly **send partners and customers newsletters or announcements** through the mail, consider how you can extend the reach of your content by sending that information through email, Twitter, or a blog. Also, consider adding the Web site address for the social media platforms you use to the direct mail you send as a way to drive traffic to your online destinations.

Section V. Social Media Monitoring and Measurement

How to measure the success of social media efforts?

How can you tell if it is worth it? A measurement process can help you track the results of your efforts to communicate hard and soft data. By mixing these two types of measurements, you will see what is and is not working within your social media strategy. You also will be able to discover trends, new influencers in your community, and different channels and places online to connect with those you serve. Here are some examples of hard and soft data:

Hard Data	*Soft Data*
Number of newsletter subscribers	Engagement and interaction with those you serve
Number of followers on Twitter or fans on Facebook	Reputation
Staff time saved by using social media	Loyalty
Cost savings from using social media	Satisfaction
Donations	Sentiment—positive or negative feedback in media coverage
Increased rank in Google and Yahoo! search engine results	Feedback from those you serve
Increased coverage in newspapers, TV news, and online	

Now that you know what kind of information to look for, you need to learn how to find it and where to look. There are a number of free online tools that can help you identify these data quickly and easily; a few examples of these tools are included at the end of this chapter.

Keep in mind that since these tools are free, they are not always 100 percent accurate. This is especially true if they try to determine whether a piece of content is positive or negative. These free tools are great for quick data collection, but be sure to experiment and find the tool that works best for your needs.

How do I showcase and communicate our social media success?

Once you have the measurement metrics in place, use them to tell the story of your social media strategy. One way to do this is by writing a case study. Write out the challenges your organization faced before using social media, the solutions you created with social media, and then the results.

Once you have the case study, share it with your colleagues and partners to illustrate the value of social media. Doing so will not only highlight your work but also may provide you with more support to further incorporate social media tools into your organization's projects.

The following social media tools are free to use and can help measure your social media activities:

Facebook Insights: A tool to monitor engagement and influence on your Facebook page. As page administrator, you can access data about your page from the Facebook Insights dashboard. The data includes statistics such as daily and monthly active users, daily new "likes," daily interactions like comments, the geographic location of your visitors, external referrals, internal link traffic, and more.

Klout: Provides a summary of your organization's social influence by displaying a ranking that factors in your reach and impact on Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn.

Bit.ly URL Shortener: Bit.ly not only shortens your URL, but also offers analytics and click data for every link shortened.

Advanced Twitter Search: The advanced features can be used to find tweets about yourself and your organization.

YouTube Insight: Enables you to view detailed statistics about the number of views and popularity for the videos you have uploaded to YouTube. NOTE: You need to have a verified YouTube account to use this feature.

Flickr: Flickr provides metrics that enable you to see statistics such as views for your photos, sets, and galleries separated under categories such as today, yesterday, and all-time. It lets you know about your most viewed photos, and also tells you how many have received comments.

Social Mention: A free social media analysis platform that enables you to easily track and measure what others are saying about you online by monitoring more than 100 social media sites, including Twitter, Flickr, and YouTube.

Technorati.com: The leading blog search engine and directory, Technorati.com indexes more than a million blogs. Technorati.com tracks not only the authority and influence of blogs, but also the most comprehensive and current index of who and what is most popular in the Blogosphere.

Partnerships

How can partnerships help my organization with outreach?

Although you can conduct SNAP outreach alone, your efforts will be more successful if you work with like-minded organizations. Since only employees of local SNAP offices can certify clients for benefits, one of your most critical partners is your local SNAP office. It is important to establish a relationship with their employees before implementing your outreach efforts.

Partnerships with other groups can expand your ability to get the word out about SNAP benefits by:

- Gaining entry into new demographic and geographic areas;
- Providing new avenues of communication;
- Increasing the visibility and credibility of your message through a unified community voice;
- Leveraging your limited resources and making sure your efforts are not duplicative.

Here is what you will find in this section:

- Ten steps for establishing a partnership;
- Useful template materials that can be tailored for local needs; and
- Examples of outreach and partnership materials.

What if I have questions about outreach and partnerships?

Go to the SNAP Web site at http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/default.htm. There you will find free materials, such as fllers, brochures, and radio and television public service announcements (PSAs) as well as general information about outreach and promising practices.

Learn from your colleagues by joining the Food Stamp Outreach Coalition, a nationwide network of advocacy groups and partner organizations that work to promote the health and nutrition benefits of SNAP. Formed in 2003, this core group of national food banks, community and faith-based groups, and service organizations work together to end hunger and improve nutrition.

For more information about the Coalition, please visit the Web site at http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/about.htm.

If you have other questions about outreach or this toolkit, please contact us at SNAPOUTREACH@fns.usda.gov.

What are the steps for developing and maintaining a partnership?

It is important to establish a framework and timeline for your partnership. The following 10 steps can help you establish a plan or respond to requests from other groups who want to discuss partnership opportunities:

10 Steps To Developing And Maintaining Partnerships

1. Meet local SNAP office employees

2. Select a target audience

3. Determine which partners will effectively reach your target audience

4. Research, develop needs assessment and prepare accordingly

5. Contact your prospective partners

6. Jointly establish your outreach plan

7. Confirm partnership roles and responsibilities

8. Stay in touch with your partners

9. Evaluate your partnership and effectiveness of outreach efforts

10. Share your successes

Step 1 Meet Local Snap Office

One of your most important partners is your local SNAP office. You may need to work through these 10 steps with your local SNAP office even before you work through them with other potential partners. It is important to keep the SNAP office informed and updated as you move forward with your plans with other partners.

There are several important reasons to inform your local office at an early stage in your planning:

- Possible funding opportunities through the State outreach plan. Provide the local office with outreach plan information, if needed, and give them time to check to see if the State has a plan. If there is a plan, you may want to explore how your organization can be included in the plan.

- A local SNAP office may participate in a community/county board, task force, coalition or be working with contractors/grantees on nutrition education or outreach efforts.

- Only a local SNAP office can certify applicants for the Program. Local offices need to know your plans so employees can be informed about the project, plan for an increase in calls or applications, or help with evaluation.

- Customer service at local offices is critical to the success of your project. The local office may need time to implement new customer service procedures (e.g., arranging for more phone or email coverage or assigning more workers to intake) before the campaign is launched. To be successful, work together to make sure there are no customer service barriers when applicants contact the local office.

- The local office may need to review outreach activities already in place at the county and State level, as well as State policies on specific aspects of partnership.

- The local or State office can also provide or help you obtain a wealth of information, including:

    - Data on underserved populations in your community;

    - Updates on outreach activities already being conducted so you can enhance current efforts and avoid duplication of work;

    - Information on other organizations they routinely work with;

    - Information about local office services such as business hours, locations, off-site schedules, and phone numbers. This is important because some local offices may have multiple offices or may visit or have employees stationed at partner sites;

    - Application forms, informational materials, papers, or links to prescreening tools, or links to Web-based application forms;

    - Assistance with tracking and administrative data (this is especially important in evaluating the effectiveness of your efforts); and,

    - Assistance in training your employees, partners, or volunteers.

Step 2 Select A Target Audience

Decide which populations you want to reach through your outreach activities. National SNAP data shows that the most hard-to-reach and underserved populations are seniors (age 60 and older), immigrants, and the working poor. However, the target audience for your community may be different.

For example, your community may have a large number of homeless individuals, veterans, or recently unemployed individuals. By developing partnerships early, you can complete or update a community needs assessment to discuss:

- Which populations in your community tend to be underserved, where they tend to congregate, and which organizations are trusted.

- Materials available to reach your audience. This could be an opportunity to co-brand materials.

- Your local SNAP office or other organizations may know about other campaigns that are occurring.

Step 3 Choose Partners

To decide whom to choose as partners, brainstorm and make a list of organizations that your target audience trusts and whose services they regularly use. Seek advice from others:

- Ask the local SNAP office what organizations they work with and are trusted by their clients.

- Consult with the SNAP office on whether there is a State outreach plan. Also, ask local offices what types of outreach they conduct (e.g., local office may visit a senior center monthly to interview and accept application forms).

- Ask staff in your office which organizations they work with on a regular basis.

- Take advantage of any advisory groups, county boards, or task forces that work with your organization to determine how best to reach the target group.

- Ask existing partners for input about other groups that might be interested in this outreach effort.

- Ask your customers for the names of groups or channels they regularly go to for information.

See page 11 for a list of potential partners.

Special Consideration For Business Partners

Although local businesses have a genuine interest in helping out the needy in their community and will most likely have a formal community relations staff member, they also are driven by profit motivation and will have to think about their bottom line. If you plan to approach a local business or retailer about partnership, you may have to emphasize the economic arguments for participation in your project.

(See "Introduction" section for SNAP fact sheet.) Be sure you can tell retailers how SNAP participation helps their business thrive. Be sure you can tell employers how participation in SNAP will help their employees. Be prepared to discuss any public relations concerns and, if necessary, help them frame their messaging.

See pages 12-13 for a list of activities for outreach partnerships.

Step 4 Research

Research And Get Prepared

Increase your chances of success by being prepared before you contact your prospective partner.

Research

Take time to learn if there is a community needs assessment. You may start with the local SNAP office to see if there is an outreach plan in place. You may also consult with other outreach providers, organizations, public officials, or advocates. If there is no existing needs assessment, you may want to host a meeting to get one started. If there is an assessment place, review it and see if any adjustments are needed.

Also, learn as much as you can about prospective partners. Make sure you understand the role the organization plays in the community and whom the organization serves. These are some ways you can do this:

- Ask others in your office what they know about the prospective partner.

- Ask if anyone in your office has the name of a contact.

- Study the organization's Web site.

Get Prepared

Collect your ideas. Be prepared for questions your partner may ask.
Be sure you can:

- Provide a brief overview of your organization.

- For community partners, promote the health and economic benefits of SNAP.

- Present the partnership as a "win-win" situation for all parties.

- Explain the role partners can play to assist potentially eligible people in accessing SNAP.

- If the SNAP office is one of your partners, explain the role the local office plays in your project.

- Discuss the importance of the project and the benefits of working with your organization. Explain how you can help their customers learn about and apply for SNAP benefits.

Tips & Tools

A community needs assessment can help your organization learn about other organizations who are targeting your audience.

Discussions may lead to ideas that can save your organization dollars (e.g., developing and printing a combined brochure or multiple program outreach efforts.)

Step 5 Contact Potential Partners

As you approach potential partners, remember that enthusiasm goes a long way. But if a potential partner says no to your ideas, don't get discouraged. Your ideas might not fit into their schedule right now, but they may be willing to revisit the discussion at a later date. In the meantime, there will be other partnership opportunities. Try the next organization on your list.

Call

Ask people in your organization for a contact name. If no one has a contact name, check out the Web site. Call the potential partner to start the ball rolling and gauge their interest. Here are some tips for making this initial call:

- Practice your talking points in advance. Do this regardless of whether you are talking to an acquaintance or someone you don't know. (See the "Media Outreach" section for a pitch script.)

- Don't just read directly from the script; personalize and use a conversational tone.

- Be respectful of your contact's time; ask if it is a good time for a conversation. Often these calls are best if they are pre-scheduled.

- Offer to schedule an appointment to conduct a meeting in person.

- Invite them to your offices for a tour and a brief overview of your proposed project.

Write

If you can't reach your contact by phone, send an email or letter. Here are some tips on composing your email or letter:

- Personalize and localize the information as much as possible. Your partner will want to know why you selected their group and what role you will want them to play in the project. (Sample partner letter is at the end of this chapter)

- Provide statistics on why outreach should be conducted in your community.

- Keep the letter short and to the point.

- Proofread your letter before sending it out.

- Promise to follow up. Don't wait for a call. Post a reminder on your calendar and call back in a few days.

Meet

If you have scheduled a meeting with your partners, here are some helpful tips for a successful meeting:

- Confirm the meeting date, time, and any equipment a day or two before the scheduled meeting.

- Send an agenda and some informational materials by email or mail before the meeting. Include a list of meeting participants.

- Tailor your presentation to your audience. Take along materials from this toolkit or your agency that are appropriate to your audience, and leave materials for the partner to review after the meeting.

- Provide your partners with information about the nutrition and economic benefits of SNAP. If you are talking with a local SNAP office, discuss how your organization will conduct prescreening or provide application assistance, and how they will submit the application forms. Clear procedures are needed to protect the date the application was filed.

- Specify your role in this project.

- Be clear and direct about how you would like them to be involved and what they can expect in return.

- Be clear on funding. If there is no funding available, be sure that is understood. You may also want to discuss State outreach plans and the process to obtain funding.

- Bring your partnership ideas to the table.

- Listen to the ideas your future partners have.

- Look professional, be on time, and be respectful of their time.

Step 6 Establish Your Strategy

Once you and your partner have agreed to work together, take some time to jointly establish a plan for your outreach. Discuss your goals and the strategies or activities you will use to reach those goals.

Examples of Outreach Goals

- Educate people about the nutrition and economic benefits of SNAP (e.g., presentations, distribution of materials, public service announcements, promotion of EBT card, etc.)

- Increase the number of organizations that invite local SNAP offices to their facilities for presentations, application assistance, or certification interviews. Increase the number of application forms distributed at locations such as food banks, health centers, retail stores, unemployment offices, and technical colleges.

- Increase the number of individuals prescreened for SNAP benefits at partner organizations.

- Increase the number of callers to a local/State toll-free number. You may wish to check out the local 211 number.

- Increase media coverage about the benefits of SNAP participation.

- Increase the number of visitors to a local Web site that contains community resources or other information.

- Increase the number of locations offering extended day and weekend SNAP application assistance.

You will also want to discuss the following issues with your new partner:

- How many people do you want to reach?

- What are the roles and responsibilities of each partner?

- How will funding be handled? Will Federal reimbursement be acquired through the State outreach plan or a grant?

- How will you evaluate your work and determine success?

- How will problems and disputes be identified and resolved?

Using Volunteers

Volunteers are enthusiastic and eager to help. If your plan calls for the use of volunteers, be sure you discuss these issues with your partner as well:

- How will you train volunteers to let them know what they can and can't do? For example, they can schedule appointments and fill out application forms, and obtain verification documents, but they cannot certify households for SNAP benefits.

- How will you educate volunteers about SNAP?

- How will you handle volunteer turnover?

- How will you thank your volunteers?

- How will you ensure client confidentiality?

Step 7 Confirm Responsibilities

Confirm your partnership arrangements in writing by sending a letter to your new partner(s). If the partnership is straightforward, this document can be simple. Just list the details of the partnership. You may want to include a summary of the role and responsibilities of each partner. A partner agreement letter template is at the end of this chapter.

Step 8 Stay In Touch

Once your partnership is established and outreach is underway, keep your partners informed and involved. It is especially important to keep the local SNAP office informed of your work. Give them advance notice of, and invite them to, any events or special projects that you host.

Here are some suggestions to help maintain your partnership:

- Update your partners on activities. Be sure to call or meet periodically to check in on how things are going, identify challenges, and share best practices.

- Send periodic "thank you" notes to partners and volunteers including local office workers. Let them know how many new people are getting the benefits of SNAP as a result of their efforts.

- Offer to include your partners in promotional activities, such as a newsletter or an event.

Establishing and Maintaining a Strong Partnership

Present the partnership as a "win-win" situation for all parties. Emphasize the positive local economic impact of increased participation.

- Agree on goals and objectives.
- Develop clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
- Practice clear and frequent communications.
- Show appreciation through recognition.

Step 9 Evaluate Your Partnerships

Although partnerships can be time-consuming, they can also be a valuable part of your work. It is important to track the value of these collaborations so that you can determine if you met your goals and what did and didn't work. You can use either process measures, outcome measures, or both, depending on the nature of your partnership.

Partnership Process Measures

- Has the number of partnerships increased since you began your alliance-building program? If not, why?

- When you established your partnerships, you began with a clear list of expectations. Are those expectations being met? If not, why?

- Do staff who are working on the partnerships feel it is proceeding well? What could be done differently?

- Do your partners approach you with new and creative ideas for working together?

- How are those suggestions addressed?

- Have your partners provided you with new information and expertise?

- Have you integrated these ideas into your outreach efforts?

Partnership Outcome Measures

- Have you seen an increase in calls to your local number? How did people learn of the number? What information are callers requesting?

- When clients call or visit the local SNAP office, are they asked how they learned about SNAP? Was it from your outreach effort? If these clients were a part of your project, does the local office staff think they are better prepared (for instance, form filled out and verification documents in hand) for the certification interview?

- Work with the local SNAP office to assign a code (such as a color, label, or number) for your organization that is placed on all applications that you distribute. Ask the local office if they can track this information and report back to you, or provide you with the technology to track these cases yourself.

- Has your ability to reach the target audience improved? Have more people from the target audience called or come into your office or visited the local SNAP office as a result of a partnership? Has participation increased? If not, why?

- If you host an event, such as prescreening at a grocery store, track the number of people in attendance and the number of applicants prescreened for SNAP benefits. Don't just prescreen, help people gather the information needed for the certification interview.

- Follow up with the local office to determine how many of the applications your organization submitted were approved or denied benefits. If possible, try to obtain reasons for denial. This can help you assess your training program. If approved, try to get the benefit amount to help you demonstrate the economic benefit to your community.

- If informational materials were distributed, track what materials were used and how many were given out.

- Did your partner help generate media coverage that increases the awareness of SNAP benefits? Keep track of the media clips.

Step 10 Share Your Success

Once you demonstrate success, share it! By sharing your outreach and partnership successes, other organizations will clearly see the value and benefits of joining in the outreach effort. You can:

- Mention your current partners when presenting or attending meetings and conferences.

- Write up your success and submit it on SNAP's Promising Outreach Practices Web page.

- Nominate your local office as a Hunger Champion.

- Submit editorials to local newspapers, participate in other media campaigns and draft articles for inclusion in newsletters.

Potential Partners

Community Service Groups

- Food banks and pantries
- Community action agencies
- Homeless shelters and soup kitchens
- Family support centers (e.g., day care, domestic violence shelters, literacy, utility assistance programs)
- Legal Aid
- Salvation Army
- Goodwill
- Voluntary Income Tax Assistance (VITA) locations

Faith-Based Organizations

- Churches
- Temples
- Mosques
- Synagogues

City, County, State, Or Federal Government

- Local SNAP offices
- Local health department
- Employment assistance offices, including one-stop career centers
- Schools and technical colleges
- Department of Motor Vehicles
- Property tax offices
- Mayor or city or county officials
- Housing projects
- Federal agencies (for prisoners with imminent release)
- Local Social Security office
- Local military bases or installations
- Local or regional IRS offices

Business And Labor

- Employers
- Grocery stores
- Local unions
- Transit providers
- Utility companies

Medical Community

- Doctors
- Hospitals
- Pharmacies
- Community Health Centers
- Medicaid offices
- WIC offices

Seniors' Groups

- Assisted living facilities
- Area Agencies on Aging
- AARP Foundation chapters
- Meals-on-Wheels program

Immigrant Groups

- Local consulates
- Clubes de Oriundos
- Immigrant service organizations (e.g., the Michoacan Federation, Lao American Community Service)

Media Organizations

- Radio
- TV
- Newspapers
- Internet
- Blogs
- Twitter
- Facebook
- YouTube

Activities For Potential Outreach Partnerships

Community groups/agencies/other organizations can:

- Conduct SNAP eligibility prescreenings.

- Provide application assistance. Distribute SNAP application forms and help potential clients fill out the forms. Explain to potential applicants what types of information and documentation the local SNAP office will need in order to complete the application process. Outreach providers may assist applicants in collecting the documents and provide translation services, when appropriate.

- Include information about the nutrition and health benefits of SNAP in newsletters or other local outreach materials.

- Display posters or fliers in lobbies, waiting areas, employee break areas, health clinic checkout areas, nutrition education rooms, etc. Local informational materials may be posted to show where/when outreach workers will be available to assist potential applicants.

- Post information on Web site and link to Step 1, the FNS eligibility prescreening tool.

- Provide SNAP information or giveaways at community events such as health or county fairs.

- Host a "nutrition/health fair" to promote SNAP benefits.

Retailers/grocers can:

- Play PSAs on in-store radio.

- Include fliers and brochures in mailings and weekly circulars.

- Include SNAP benefit information on store receipts and in grocery bags.

- Print SNAP information on grocery bags. Make it lively—a grocery bag image containing the national toll-free number is available from USDA. Advertise SNAP information on grocery carts.

- Design, produce, and post promotional materials about SNAP benefits in the store — posters, banners, floor graphics, recipe cards, etc.

- Provide SNAP information in the checkout display area.

- Underwrite paid advertising on local media.

- Underwrite printing of outreach materials.

- Allow eligibility prescreening to be conducted in the store or outside of it.

- Underwrite the hiring of outreach workers in partner agencies.

- Underwrite the salary of an outstationed eligibility worker.

- Underwrite a mobile office to conduct application assistance at all of their stores in a State or region.

Activities For Potential Outreach Partnerships

Pharmacies can:

- Include SNAP information on the patient information form that is stapled to prescription drugs.

- Include information in circulars.

- Air PSAs on in-store radio.

- Advertise SNAP information on shopping carts.

- Post information on pharmacy Web sites.

- Encourage sponsorship of health fairs where prescreening for benefits can take place.

- Allow outreach and application assistance in stores.

Employers can:

- Include SNAP information in new employee packets, newsletters, job training programs, etc.

- Put a notice about a local or national toll-free number on paycheck stubs.

- Make periodic announcements about SNAP over the intercom system.

- Post SNAP information on bulletin boards.

- Invite outreach providers or SNAP workers onsite to discuss program requirements, conduct prescreenings or certification interviews.

Transit companies can:

- Provide free advertising space on bus shelters, buses, and subways/ light rail.

- Include fliers and brochures in mailings.

Utility companies can:

- Put SNAP benefits information in newsletters.

- Print information on utility bills.

- Enclose insert along with invoice.

- Allow organizations to give out informational materials or prescreen and conduct application assistance for SNAP benefits onsite.

Media organizations can:

- Air public service announcements (PSAs). Provide a disc jockey or on-air celebrity to be the official spokesperson of your outreach effort, or make an appearance at community events, such as a "nutrition fair."

- Serve as a media advisor to your outreach efforts.

- Introduce groups to local businesses who may be interested in funding newspaper, radio, or TV ads.

- Obtain celebrity endorsers of SNAP outreach.

Get Involved!

Partners With A Common Goal

Community and faith-based groups, retailers, and anti-hunger advocacy groups across the country have a common goal to reduce hunger, improve nutrition, and increase economic activity.

Strength In Numbers

By coming together in partnership, we can advance our efforts to inform individuals and families in our communities about SNAP, ensuring that everyone can eat right, even when money's tight.

Raising Awareness

There are a number of ways you can help inform members of your community about the nutrition benefits of SNAP.

Ways To Inform Members Of Your Community

- Order and hang free fliers on bulletin boards in offices, lobbies, or lunch/break rooms.

- Provide free SNAP resources including USDA's free tri-fold brochures and bookmarks (available in English and Spanish) for waiting rooms, health fairs, libraries, and community centers.

- Insert free SNAP materials in grocery bags, informational packets, new employee materials, etc.

- Include the SNAP toll-free number or Web site (www.fns.usda.gov/snap) on promotional pieces such as posters, fliers, milk or egg cartons, paper or plastic bags, store receipts, and in-store displays.

- Include information about Step 1, SNAP's online prescreening tool and application assistance in promotional pieces or make arrangements with employers or senior groups to allow individuals to use the prescreening tool to learn about their possible eligibility for SNAP benefits.

- Publish an article about the nutrition benefits of SNAP in your employee or group newsletters and magazines.

- Broadcast SNAP public service announcements (PSAs) at your store or company or use your contacts to get donated time at radio stations.

- Add a link to www.usda.gov/snap from your Web page.

- Host a special SNAP prescreening event, cooking demonstration, or information fair.

- Volunteer at an activity to raise awareness about SNAP (options could include helping at a food pantry or food bank, soup kitchen, or prescreening event).

- Subscribe to the SNAP Outreach Coalition listserv and learn about other outreach efforts taking place across the country.

- Encourage the use of online application tools, where appropriate.

10 Ideas for Retailer SNAP Outreach

Help your customers learn about the nutrition benefits of SNAP.

SNAP benefits bring Federal funds into your community that can increase sales at your store and act as an immediate economic stimulus. With SNAP benefits, your low-income customers can purchase more healthy foods such as fruits and vegetables, whole-grain foods, and dairy products. This increases total economic activity in your community by freeing up family budgets to make additional purchases which in turn increase productivity and demand. For every $5.00 redeemed in SNAP benefits, as much as $9.20 in additional economic activity is generated. As a retailer, you can:

1. **DISPLAY** SNAP posters, fliers, magnets, and other materials. Go to http://snap.ntis.gov for free USDA materials and promotional items.

2. **FORM** partnerships with local groups such as food banks, anti-hunger groups, or other community or faith-based groups and invite them to staff an information table to give out SNAP information or prescreen customers for eligibility and conduct application assistance. Also, host nutritious food tastings or cooking demonstrations. Give out recipe cards that contain nutrition information and the national or local SNAP toll-free number.

3. **PUT** SNAP information, such as national or local SNAP toll-free numbers, on grocery bags and in weekly circulars and bulletins.

4. **PUBLISH** SNAP materials in languages spoken in your community.

5. **PRINT** SNAP promotional messages on store receipts.

6. **BROADCAST** SNAP public service announcements in the store.

7. **EDUCATE** cashiers about the benefits of SNAP.

8. **ENCOURAGE** EBT processors to add recorded messages to help-desk numbers promoting the nutrition benefits of SNAP and encouraging SNAP clients to "tell a friend."

9. **UNDERWRITE** the cost of outreach worker salaries at partner agencies.

10. **UNDERWRITE** the salary of an outstationed SNAP eligibility worker.

The Benefits of SNAP

The Program Helps Low-Income Families:

- Stretch food dollars. Those receiving SNAP benefits spend more money on food than other low-income households.

- Fight obesity through education. Nutrition educators teach SNAP participants the importance of a quality diet, how to prepare healthy low-cost meals, and how to make healthy choices.

- Put more food on the table for their children. SNAP benefits are an investment in our future.

- Keep older adult family members independent. For seniors, participation can help improve nutrition status and overall health, and increase independence.

- Transition to self-sufficiency. SNAP helps participants become financially stable and provides needed support as they transition to self-sufficiency. Half of all new participants leave the program within nine months.

The Program Helps States and Local Economies By:

- Supporting local food retailers.

- Every $5 in new SNAP benefits generates as much as $9.20 in economic activity.

- Supporting farmers.

- Leveraging Federal funds. SNAP benefits are Federal funds. By partnering with FNS and increasing the number of people in SNAP, States can bring Federal money into their States and communities.

The Program Helps Businesses and Workers:

- Achieve optimal performance. Employees whose food needs are met at home may have higher productivity and take fewer sick days for themselves and their children.

- Attain self-sufficiency. SNAP benefits supplement the food budgets of low-income workers so they can stay independent, work toward self-sufficiency and purchase additional household necessities.

Tips & Tools

Within your community, there may be a host of potential partners interested in joining your effort to boost SNAP enrollment and inform people of the nutrition benefits of the program. Retailers, businesses, community-based organizations, and government entities can all play a vital role in SNAP outreach.

Partner Letter Template

[DATE]

[NAME]
[TITLE]
[BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION]
[ADDRESS]
[CITY], [STATE] [ZIP CODE]

Dear Mr./Ms. [NAME]:

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the first line of defense against hunger. On behalf of [ORGANIZATION NAME], I am writing to invite you to lend your support to [STATE/ CITY/TOWN'S] SNAP outreach effort by *[Describe the request — an activity you would like the organization to participate in, such as: hosting a health fair or prescreening event; volunteering; distributing informational flyers; promoting events; etc.].*

The goal of this outreach effort is to ensure that everyone who is eligible for SNAP knows about the program and is able to access benefits. Our organization is helping to promote the nutrition benefits of SNAP.

[Provide local information on what your organization is doing, who you plan to target in your campaign, and the need in your community (number of potentially eligible individuals that are not being served for this type of effort.)]

We hope you will join us in supporting [ORGANIZATION or COALITION NAME's] outreach efforts; we would be honored to work with you. With your support, we are confident that we can reach more of [CITY/STATE's] individuals and families not yet enrolled in SNAP. By participating, *[List benefits to organization such as: reinforces position as community leader; provides opportunity for positive media exposure; offers community service opportunities; etc.].*

I will contact you in the next few days to further discuss the vital role you can play in helping our community. In the meantime, feel free to contact me at [PHONE NUMBER] should you have any questions. I have also enclosed additional information on SNAP benefits for your review.

Again, we hope you can join us in supporting this important effort, and look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,

[NAME]
[TITLE]

Partnership Agreement Letter Template

[DATE]

[NAME]
[TITLE]
[BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION]
[ADDRESS]
[CITY], [STATE] [ZIP CODE]

Dear Mr./Ms. [NAME]:

Thank you so much for agreeing to partner with [NAME OF YOUR ORGANIZATION] to help us reach those low-income individuals and families in our community who can benefit from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Our partnership is part of a larger national effort to ensure that everyone who is eligible for SNAP benefits receives them.

Below is an outline of the partnership specifics we discussed:

(Partner to gain inclusion in the State's SNAP outreach plan and leverage federal reimbursement for SNAP outreach activities.)

In-Kind Donations

- Financial contribution for production of materials such as pamphlets, bus/subway ads, bus/subway shelter ads, pot holders, recipe cards, application assistance, other giveaways, etc.
- In-store space to conduct nutrition events, pre-screenings, etc.
- Placement of PSA or donated print advertisement space, etc.
- Personnel support to help fill out SNAP application forms, obtain verification documents, submit completed applications on behalf of clients, etc.

Promotional Opportunities

- Appearance of company name in SNAP media materials.
- Visibility in Advertising, Media and Event Signage
- Your company's logo on SNAP signage and in outreach materials.
- Opportunity for a company representative to attend/participate at event(s).

We're so glad you see the value of partnering on such an important outreach effort. Please feel free to call me at [PHONE NUMBER] with any questions. Thank you once again.

Sincerely,
[NAME]
[TITLE]

⚒ Tips & Tools

How can I initiate a partnership? If a relationship is not currently in place, a good way to initiate a partnership is by sending a letter to a community relations, marketing, or communications contact. Your letter should outline your outreach effort, provide background information on your organization and SNAP, and describe the nature of your partnership request. This is a template letter that you can use with your own letterhead.

Media Events

When is a media event or press conference appropriate?

Media events or press conferences are used to convey information and attract attention. They allow you to deliver time-sensitive news to many media outlets at once. Because events involve a lot of time, and because attendance and coverage aren't guaranteed, think carefully before you make a decision to move forward.

What should I consider when deciding whether a media event is warranted?

- Is there a visual element to your news? Keep in mind what will look good in a photo or on TV.

- Is there an alternative format to deliver your news that would be equally or more effective, such as a press release? Is your event newsworthy, timely, and of interest to the media? (See "Five Components of a Newsworthy Story" in the Media Outreach section.)

- Will an event offer reporters special advantages, such as contact with experts, officials, and other important local figures?

What are some examples of things that might warrant an event or press conference?

- Formation of new and important partnerships;

- Opening of a new facility;

- Announcement of a new program;

- Release of an important study or survey; or

- Announcement of the receipt of a new grant.

At what time should I plan the media event?

Check your local calendar listings before planning an event to make sure it doesn't conflict with another major media event. The optimal time to schedule a media event or news conference is 10 a.m. This allows time in the morning for the assignment editor to review the story options for the day and to assign a reporter to your event. Remember, TV and radio producers need time to edit the story for broadcast, and newspaper reporters need time to write.

Consider also that your event might be more successful at certain times of the year, for instance when school's out and children no longer have access to a school lunch program, or around the holidays when people are sensitive to hunger issues.

Where should I have the media event?

The location of your event should be relevant to the issue or story being presented. Hold your event in a central location, near the media, to help facilitate coverage. Take the time to scout your location before you choose it, and visit it a few times again before you host your event. Make sure there is nearby parking for news vans, as crews often carry heavy equipment to and from the event site.

Anticipate what equipment will be necessary and make sure there is adequate space for equipment at your location. If you expect cameras or radio reporters, you must have a podium and microphone. In many cases, television and radio reporters tape their own microphones directly on to the podium. Be sure there is room for a table for press releases, statements, and check-in.

- **Outdoor events:** Consider the weather and noise, and arrange for an alternate indoor site.
- **Indoor events:** Think about space. You will need room for TV cameras and other media, guests, and your own audiovisual equipment. Know beforehand where electrical plugs and light switches are located.

Whom should I invite?

Consider inviting community leaders, including the mayor, local council members, or notable nutritionists to speak at a news conference. Work with your local SNAP office to select speakers and develop the invitation list. Not only will this make your event more appealing to the media, but it demonstrates that improving nutrition in your area is a community effort.

The media usually take an interest in the human side of an issue. See if you can identify a family that has a positive story to tell about its experience with SNAP.

How should I invite the media?

The most common way to invite media to a press conference is with a media advisory. The advisory gives enough details about the event to pique an outlet's interest, but not so many that it gives away the entire story.

Send your advisory to the assignment editor or reporter one to two days before your event. On the morning of your event, follow up with the reporter or assignment editor and be sure to include on-site contact information, such as cell phone numbers and exact site location. Assignment desks often do not know whom they will send until the day of the event.

What else do I need to do in advance?

- **Prepare signage** such as banners and podium signs that can be placed prominently in front of the cameras and photographers. Be sure to properly position signage (you do not want it blocked by speakers, equipment, etc.).

- **Spokesperson(s)** Assign one or two spokespeople, such as the head of your organization or a local dignitary, to speak and/or answer media questions at the event. Brief your spokespeople beforehand and make sure they are approved to speak in front of the press. In addition to having official spokespeople, the media will be attracted to a story that puts a human face on the issue of hunger. Because some people may not want others to know they are using SNAP benefits, approach this issue with sensitivity and prudence. Be sure all your spokespersons speak clearly and are easily understood .

- **Prepare an agenda.** Decide the order of the speakers, the length of their remarks, and who will act as master of ceremonies. Keep each person's remarks to no more than 10 minutes and plan on having no more than three speakers.

- **Prepare your press kits.** Include the following in your press kit:
  - Agenda
  - Fact sheet
  - Bios of speakers and interviewees
  - Copies of any graphs, charts, and other visuals
  - Photographs
  - Brochures

- **List your event in your local community calendars.** Larger cities also have a local Associated Press (AP) office that you can call. Ask to have your event put on their calendar, known as the Daybook. There is a State-by-State listing of AP bureaus at the end of this section.

- **Call the press** as a reminder prior to the day of the event.

What should I do on the day of the event?

- Set up a table for media and guest sign-in and press kit distribution.

- Greet the guests as they arrive and provide them with assigned seating and other pertinent information.

- Start on time, even if attendance is sparse.

What should I do after the event?

- Send thank-you notes or letters to the guests and special speakers.

- Follow up with media who were not able to attend — ASAP. Send press kits to reporters who couldn't attend the event. Place follow up calls and ask reporters if they are interested in conducting a phone interview with one of the spokespeople.

- Monitor and collect news articles

Examples of Visuals

Informational Visuals
Pie charts and graphs from new research, such as charts that show the number of people in your area who are eligible for SNAP benefits, but not receiving them.

Backdrop, like a large sign with the organization name; or the backdrop might be something that conveys information — like shelves of food at a food bank

Symbolic Visual
A table display of healthy foods to demonstrate the foods that a family of four could buy with SNAP benefits in a month.

What are some examples of events I could host?

Here are some examples of events to generate coverage of hunger issues and SNAP benefits, as well as simple, inexpensive visuals to use, and spokespeople to offer for interviews.

Announcement of New Study Findings

LOCATION: A community center, community or faith-based organization, food bank

INTERVIEWEES: Head of your organization, mayor, council members, nutritionist, recipients of SNAP benefits

VISUALS: Graphs and charts, key findings one-pager

A "Day In The Life" Grocery Shopping

LOCATION: A supermarket. The idea would be to have local media person "shop" for a family of four with a limited budget so they can understand what it is like to buy nutritious food when money's tight.

INTERVIEWEES: Recipients of SNAP benefits, grocery store manager, nutritionist

VISUALS: Healthy food, use of the EBT card

Cooking Demonstration For Recipients Of Snap Benefits

LOCATION: A food bank, culinary school, kitchens at schools, faith-based or community center, supermarket

INTERVIEWEES: A nutritionist, recipients of SNAP benefits, a local dignitary, a chef from a well-known local restaurant

VISUALS: Good, healthy food being prepared, a nutrition chart, images of people learning about how to eat well and economically, recipe cards

Associated Press (AP): State-by-State Listing

State	City	Phone
AK	Anchorage	(907) 272-7549
AL	Montgomery	(334) 262-5947
AR	Little Rock	(501) 225-3668
AZ	Phoenix	(602) 258-8934
CA	Los Angeles	(213) 626-1200
CO	Denver	(303) 825-0123
CT	Hartford	(860) 246-6876
DC	Washington	(202) 776-9400
DE	Dover	(302) 674-3037
FL	Miami	(305) 594-5825
GA	Atlanta	(404) 522-8971
HI	Honolulu	(808) 536-5510
IA	Des Moines	(515) 243-3281
ID	Boise	(208) 343-1894
IL	Chicago	(312) 781-0500
IN	Indianapolis	(317) 639-5501
KS	Topeka	(785) 234-5654
KY	Louisville	(502) 583-7718
LA	New Orleans	(504) 523-3931
MA	Boston	(617) 357-8100
MD	Baltimore	(410) 837-8315
ME	Portland	(207) 772-4157
MI	Detroit	(313) 259-0650
MN	Minneapolis	(612) 332-2727
MO	St. Louis	(314) 241-2496
MS	Jackson	(601) 948-5897

State	City	Phone
MT	Helena	(406) 442-7440
NC	Raleigh	(919) 833-8687
ND	Bismarck	(701) 223-8450
NE	Omaha	(402) 391-0031
NH	Concord	(603) 224-3327
NJ	Trenton	(609) 392-3622
NM	Albuquerque	(505) 822-9022
NV	Las Vegas	(702) 382-7440
NY	New York	(212) 621-1670
OH	Columbus	(614) 885-2727
OK	Oklahoma	(405) 525-2121
OR	Portland	(503) 228-2169
PA	Philadelphia	(215) 561-1133
RI	Providence	(401) 274-2270
SC	Columbia	(803) 799-6418
SD	Sioux Falls	(605) 332-3111
TN	Nashville	(615) 373-9988
TX	Dallas	(972) 991-2100
UT	Salt Lake City	(801) 322-3405
VA	Richmond	(804) 643-6646
VT	Montpelier	(802) 229-0577
WA	Seattle	(206) 682-1812
WI	Milwaukee	(414) 225-3580
WV	Charleston	(304) 346-0897
WY	Cheyenne	(307) 632-9351

Regional/State Radio Networks

Organization	City	State	Phone	Fax	Main E-mail
Alaska Public Radio Network	Anchorage	AK	(907) 263-7448	N/A	news@aprn.org
Alabama Radio Network	Birmingham	AL	(205) 439-9600	(205) 439-8390	N/A
Arkansas Radio Network	Little Rock	AR	(501) 401-0200	(501) 401-0367	N/A
Pacifica Radio Network	Berkeley	CA	(510) 849-2281	N/A	contact@pacifica.org
Connecticut Radio Network	Hamden	CT	(203) 288-2002	(203) 281-3291	N/A
Florida's Radio Networks	Maitland	FL	(888) 407-4376	(407) 916-7425	news@frn.com
Georgia News Network	Atlanta	GA	(404) 607-9045	(404) 367-1134	N/A
Radio Iowa	Des Moines	IA	(515) 282-1984	(515) 282-1879	RadioIowa@Learfield.com
Illinois Radio Network	Chicago	IL	(312) 943-6363	(312) 943-5109	N/A
Network Indiana	Indianapolis	IN	(317) 637-4638	(317) 684-2008	info@network-indiana.com
Kansas Information Network	Topeka	KS	(785) 272-2199	(785) 228-7282	info@radionetworks.com
Kentucky News Network	Louisville	KY	(502) 479-2222	(502) 479-2231	N/A
Louisiana Network, Inc.	Baton Rouge	LA	(225) 383-8695	(225) 383-5020	N/A
National Radio Network	Framingham	MA	(508) 820-2430	N/A	N/A
Michigan Radio Network	Lansing	MI	(517) 484-4888	(517) 484-1389	miradio@ameritech.net
Minnesota News Network	Minneapolis	MN	(612) 321-7200	(612) 321-7202	newsroom@mnnradio.com
MissouriNet	Jefferson City	MO	(573) 893-2829	(573) 893-8094	Info@Missourinet.com
Mississippi News Network	Jackson	MS	(601) 957-1700	(601) 956-5228	N/A
Northern Broadcasting System	Billings	MT	(406) 252-6661	(406) 245-9755	nbs@northernbroadcasting.com
North Carolina News Network	Raleigh	NC	(919) 890-6030	(919) 890-6024	N/A
North Dakota News Network	Fargo	ND	(701) 237-5000	(701) 280-0861	dakotanews@qwest.net
Ohio News Network	Columbus	OH	(614) 460-3850	(614) 460-2822	N/A
Oklahoma News Network	Oklahoma City	OK	(405) 840-9489	(405) 858-1435	N/A
Radio Pennsylvania Network	Harrisburg	PA	(717) 221-2883	(717) 232-7612	radiopa@radiopa.org
South Carolina News Network	Columbia	SC	(803) 790-4300	(803) 790-4309	N/A
South Dakota News Network	Pierre	SD	(605) 224-9911	(605) 224-8984	dakotanews@qwest.net
Tennessee Radio Network	Nashville	TN	(615) 664-2400	(615) 687-9797	N/A
Texas State Network	Arlington	TX	(800) 683-5558	(817) 543-5572	tsn@tsnradio.com
Virginia News Networks	Richmond	VA	(804) 474-0000	(804) 474-0167	N/A
Wisconsin Radio Network	Madison	WI	(608) 251-3900	(608) 251-7233	info@wrn.com
West Virginia MetroNews	Charleston	WV	(304) 346-7055	(304) 346-8262	newsroom@wvmetronews.com
United Stations Radio Network	New York	NY	(212) 869-1111	(212) 869-1115	info@unitedstations.com
USA Radio Network	Dallas	TX	(972) 484-3900	(972) 241-6826	newsroom@usaradio.com

Paid Advertising

What is paid advertising?

Paid advertising, otherwise known as paid media, is the airing of campaign messages—or advertisements—by purchasing space in media outlets, such as television and radio stations, newspapers, magazines, Web sites, and outdoor billboards.

The overall goal of an advertising strategy is to reach your audience and change behavior or attitudes. Here are the principal steps to reach that goal:

1. Surround your target audience with specific and consistent messages (e.g., about the nutrition assistance SNAP can provide to low-income individuals and families).

2. Motivate your audience to get more information, such as by calling a phone number or visiting a Web site.

How does advertising differ from media relations?

•   Advertising is repeating your messages a guaranteed number of times.

•   Media relations is outreach. It can entail sending out press releases, media advisories, feature articles, and other information. The goal is to clearly state your case to interest media outlets in using the materials or asking you for more information.

•   Messages acquired through media relations outreach are referred to as "earned" and add depth to your paid advertising efforts.

How many times must a person hear/see an advertisement in order to take action?

According to Roper Starch Worldwide research (2001), it takes:

•   3 to 4 impressions for a person to recognize that a message is an advertisement;

•   7 to 8 impressions for a person to remember the message; and

•   10 to 18 impressions for a person to change his or her attitude/ behavior as a result of hearing or seeing an advertisement.

How are paid ads different from public service announcements?

Paid Advertising

•   You pay the media outlet to air advertisements

•   You select the best time of day, programs, and outlets to reach your target audience (market research and advertising professionals and media buyers can help)

•   Ads have 100 percent guaranteed delivery and greater likelihood of reaching the target audience

Public Service Announcements

•   The media outlet airs messages free of charge to benefit target audiences

•   Because they are free, you have no control over the time of day or how often messages will run

•   It is difficult to gauge success due to irregularity of airing

What are the best media outlets to use to reach low-income individuals and families?

There are many options when purchasing advertising, including radio, television, print, Internet, and outdoor. A review of your organization's available budget and a community needs assessment are the best ways to identify the best media for advertising.

RADIO

FNS has found radio to be the most cost-effective way to reach low-income populations. Research has shown that low-income individuals use radio more frequently than the general population. Stations can use both produced ads (ads that have already been recorded) or radio readers, which are messages that an announcer can read between songs or weather/traffic updates (less expensive).

TELEVISION

Network and cable television advertising are the most effective ways to reach low-income audiences. Depending on the market and available advertising space, television is often the most expensive advertising medium. However, school and community cable stations may be an option to consider, as they typically charge much less than commercial stations.

ETHNIC MEDIA

Ethnic media outlets, such as radio stations and local newspapers, are available in media markets that have large immigrant populations. These outlets tend to be cost-effective. Readers/listeners trust these more than traditional media outlets. Ethnic television stations and cable networks typically are less expensive than mainstream television, but their availability varies from market to market.

PRINT

Immigrants and seniors often read the local daily newspaper, as well as community daily or weekly newspapers, which are often free. By placing print advertisements in these newspapers, you can better reach low-income people ages 60 and older. These local papers are often willing to print drop-in feature articles free of charge, because they help develop content.

OUTDOOR

This form of advertising includes billboards and transit advertisements. Organizations targeting audiences in urban communities that have public transportation systems may want to consider placing outdoor advertising. Outdoor advertising is helpful in raising awareness, yet it is most effective when coupled with advertising in other media.

INTERNET

While Internet use among low-income working poor and seniors is on the rise, low-income populations are less likely to use the Internet than any other medium. However, many Web sites that accept online advertising offer the opportunity to target by ZIP code. In this way, you can make sure your advertising is seen by people who live in lower-income areas of your media market. Online advertising also provides a built-in evaluation mechanism. You can count click through rates to your Web site from the advertisement.

How do I develop or select advertisements?

When developing or selecting the advertisement you want to use in your paid outreach, it is critical that the ad:

- Clearly focuses on one single important message. For example, a spot can address the stigma of SNAP, or emphasize that, by using benefits from SNAP, people can purchase healthy foods such as fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.

- Includes a call to action—such as calling a 1-800 number. Your ad must motivate your target audience to do something.

For more information about message development, see the Media Outreach section.

Does FNS have paid advertising spots that I can use?

No. However, FNS has radio scripts posted at http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/radio/default.htm, which organizations can download and record using their own actors.

If your organization is interested in purchasing its own paid advertising on television or radio stations, in print outlets, online, or on billboards, you will need to develop your own ads.

If you are interested in conducting advertising, consider contacting FNS to obtain guidance on the process of developing and placing advertising.

How do I produce my own radio spot using USDA's existing scripts?

Organizations can use the existing radio scripts from USDA's Web site. You will need to work with a talent agency and recording studio, which will finalize the spot for use on radio stations.

Does FNS have recorded public service announcements that I can use?

Yes. FNS has produced radio public service announcements at this link: http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/psas.htm.
These spots cannot be used for paid advertising due to talent restrictions.

Tips to Make Your Own Radio Buys

Partnerships with one or more media outlets can help your organization get the deepest discounts—including additional bonus placements. Establish the partnership by:

- Scheduling an in-person meeting with the station manager, public service coordinator, and/or sales manager to explain the importance of nutrition assistance to the outlet's consumers.

- Prepare and present background information about your organization, your outreach, your target audience, and the public benefit for the media outlet representatives.

- If an in-person meeting cannot be scheduled, prepare a cover letter and mail an information packet to the sales manager and public service director. Be sure to follow up by calling the sales manager or public service director to discuss opportunities.

Ask media outlets what they can provide free of charge as a "bonus" for the amount of money you are paying for space.

More information about forming partnerships is located in *Partnerships* section.

5 Key Steps To Develop An Advertising Plan

Step 1 Determine Advertising

What type of paid advertising should you conduct? How much money is available to purchase paid advertising? What are the costs associated with developing, designing, or producing advertisements? For print and outdoor advertising, consider costs to develop, design, and/or print materials. For Web site advertising, consider costs of designing ads. If new radio or television scripts are needed, consider costs for script development, production, and talent. Don't forget that State agencies can receive reimbursement from FNS for approximately 50 percent of their administrative costs for outreach to low-income people. For more information, visit http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/guidance/stateplan.htm

Step 2 Identify Target Audience

Conduct research in your State or local area to determine which low-income people have not taken advantage of nutrition assistance. Seniors? Working families? Legal immigrants? Conduct a community needs assessment to determine to whom you should reach out.

Step 3 Identify Target Area

Consider advertising in one community or "media market," one State, or multiple States, depending on your capacity. Review the FNS participation rates and demographic data at the Federal and State levels to determine where your target audience resides. Conduct a community needs assessment as described in Media Outreach section. For more information, visit http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/researchers/default.htm

Step 4 Find a Partner Organization

Find other organizations at the State or local level with whom you can partner, including another nonprofit organization or for-profit corporation with which you can pool funds. Also consider a local media outlet that could give you free or discounted advertising space. For more information about partnerships, see the Partnerships section.

Step 5 Determine Outlets

Finally, identify the top media outlets that your target audience uses. Remember, if you have a limited media buying budget, aim for lower-cost advertising options, such as radio and ethnic media. The most effective media plan is one that not only gets your message to your target audience, but gets it there with sufficient repetition.

5 Key Steps To Develop An Advertising Plan

1. Determine Advertising
2. Identify Target Audience
3. Identify Target Area
4. Find a Partner Organization
5. Determine Outlets

How should I time my advertisements?

During The Year

To increase the chance that your target audience will recognize, remember, and act on your messages, plan your advertising in conjunction with other outreach activities that are taking place. It is also a good idea to plan as far ahead as possible to negotiate the best rates with media outlets. In past years, FNS has aired radio advertisements in January and February, to coincide with cold-weather months and increased heating costs; and in mid-to-late spring, when parents begin worrying about feeding school-age children who qualify for free or reduced-price meals. However, there are certain times of the year that are more costly:

- The fall, during an election year, when candidates air lots of advertising. The amount of available space is limited and therefore more expensive.

- Winter holidays—from Thanksgiving through New Year's Day. The amount of available space is limited because of holiday advertising by businesses.

- Sweep periods during May and November. Networks typically schedule their best programs and run never-before-seen episodes of popular shows, which bring in more viewers.

During The Day

If you decide to purchase television and radio advertising, work with your media buying professional, media planner, or the stations to determine the best time of day to air the advertising. Ask outlets to provide research—in the form of data (not written analysis)—on the best times to reach the selected target audience and compare this information across stations.

Whom can I contact to find a local advertising agency?

Consult with your partners or contact your Chamber of Commerce to find a local advertising agency that can help.

What are some tips to negotiate and place advertising and to form partnerships?

A paid media plan requires extensive research and in-depth analysis of market conditions and unique viewing habits of each market. Depending on the size of your budget and the complexity of your outreach plan, you should consider hiring a media buying professional to place paid advertising. A media professional will:

- Tailor buys for various media markets within a State or throughout a region;

- Weigh markets based on the number of eligible nonparticipants; and

- Negotiate rates—discounted, free, and/or matching spots—to leverage the buy.

However, if your organization has limited funds, you may decide to place your own media buy.

Monitoring The Effectiveness of Advertising

How can I monitor the placements?

After placing a paid media buy, it is important to confirm that outlets aired your messages. Here are some tips to aid you in monitoring the placements:

Radio and Television Advertising
Request reports and invoices on how often and when the advertisements were played, and carefully review them to ensure the advertisements were placed according to the planned schedule.

Print Advertising
Request "tear sheets" or copies of the ad that ran in the publication. Your organization should obtain this information from every publication in which print ads were placed.

Online Banner Ads
Make sure to work with the designer of both banner ads and the Web site so that click-through rates and impressions are monitored from the advertising.

Outdoor Billboards and Transit Ads
Request a proof of performance after the campaign is over, which includes pictures and details about the campaign.

What should I do if my organization does not get the number of spots paid for or if the print outlet doesn't run the advertisement?

If in the course of monitoring your buy you learn that a radio or television station did not deliver the negotiated number of spots, or if a print outlet forgets to run an advertisement on a specific date, you should contact the outlet and ask it to "make good" on the original advertisement by running another in its place for no additional cost.

How can I measure effectiveness of advertising?

FNS has used a 1-800 number as its call to action in its SNAP National Media Campaign. In fact, FNS encourages partners to advertise a phone number rather than a Web site, as many low-income individuals and families do not use computers or have access to them.

To determine how effective paid advertising has been, organizations should compare the number of phone calls during advertising flights to the number of calls made during the same period in a previous year when no advertising ran. By doing so, organizations can determine how well the advertising has reached the target audience and revise future media plans accordingly.

Glossary Of Terms

Terms	Definition
Advertising	The airing of campaign messages, or advertisements, by purchasing space in media outlets.
Bonus/Value-Add	Additional air time or "free" placements that a media outlet will give an organization as a result of negotiation on the paid advertising.
Click-Through	The process of clicking on an online advertisement, which then takes you through to the advertiser's destination, usually a Web site or landing page.
Click-Through Rate (CTR)	The average number of click-throughs per hundred ad impressions, expressed as a percentage.
Cost Per Point (CPP)	The cost to reach 1 percent (or one rating point) of the individuals in a specific market. The cost per point varies by market size, demand, and advertising content. Cost Per Point = Schedule Cost / Number of Gross Rating Points
Day Part	The time of day when a television or radio ad airs. **Television** EM: Early Morning 5 a.m.–9 a.m. PA: Prime Access 7 p.m.–8 p.m. DT: Daytime 9 a.m.–3 p.m. PT: Primetime 8 p.m.–11 p.m. EF: Early Fringe 3 p.m.–5 p.m. LN: Late News 11 p.m.–11:30 p.m. EN: Early News 5 p.m.–7 p.m. LF: Late Fringe 11:30 p.m.–2 a.m. **Radio** AM Drive: 5 a.m.–10 a.m. Midday: 10 a.m.–3 p.m. PM Drive: 3 p.m.–7 p.m. Evenings: 7 p.m.–12 a.m.
Designated Media Market (DMA)	The Nielsen-designated geographic area that is covered by market-specific television stations. Currently there are 210 markets.
"Earned" or "Free" Media	Exposure obtained from a medium as a result of your publicity and lobbying.
Flight Date	The start and end dates of your advertising schedule. Typically, television and radio are purchased on a weekly basis.
Frequency	The potential number of times individuals are exposed to an advertising schedule over a given period of time.
Impressions	(Typically used with online advertising.) The number of times your ad will be seen over the course of the campaign (number of times displayed X number of viewers). If you purchase 500,000 impressions, the ad will be seen 500,000 times over the course of the advertising period.
Gross Rating Points (GRP)	The sum of all ratings. The total ratings of all programs purchased during a given period of time, which come in multiples of 100 (e.g., 100, 500, 1,000). For example, if an organization purchases advertising at 600 GRPs, the average viewer will see the ad 6 times. Gross Rating Points vary by market size and viewing habits, demographic data (such as age and gender), and timing.
Matching Spots	During negotiations, outlets frequently offer discounts in the form of free placements. For example, for every two spots an organization purchases, the media outlet may offer to air, or match, one spot for free.
Proof	A hard copy of a print ad that you review to be sure that the text is correct and the layout and colors are consistent with the electronic version of the print advertisement.
Public Service Announcement (PSA)	A public service message that a media outlet airs free of charge as part of its community service mission. The messages provide information that could significantly affect people's lives in a positive way.
Ratings	The percentage of individuals or audience watching a program in a particular market. For example, a 15-rating = 15 percent of the audience. Ratings vary depending on the age and gender that are being measured.
Reach	The percentage of different individuals exposed to a media schedule during a given period of time.
Sweep Period	Referring to television networks, the months of November and May. Viewer ratings are compiled then, so these are times when networks typically schedule their best programs and run never-before-seen episodes of popular shows, which bring in more viewers.
Tear Sheet	A copy of the ad that ran in the publication, from every publication in which print ads are placed.
Traffic	Rotation of spots during a specific media flight.

Public Service Announcements

What is a public service announcement?

Public Service Announcements, or PSAs, are public service messages that broadcasters air free of charge as part of their community service programs. Media outlets are required to donate airtime for PSAs.

Does SNAP have PSAs that my organization can use?

SNAP has a number of radio PSAs available for you to provide to local media outlets. All of the PSAs use messages that relate to target audiences. Like the national paid advertising, these messages also encourage people who are eligible for SNAP benefits to apply.

Where can I find PSAs?

You can listen to them, and stations can download them, at http://www.fns. usda.gov/cga/radio.htm. Feel free to customize these PSAs with your own toll-free number and local message. At the end of this section, you will also find scripts of these same PSAs that you can produce and adapt locally.

Can FNS' paid radio ads used be used as PSAs?

No. The FNS ads were negotiated exclusively for commercial use, not for PSA distribution.

What are my chances of placing PSAs?

Because radio stations can accommodate only a limited number of these "free" advertising spots, and because there are many groups that want to increase awareness of their causes, pitching and placing PSAs can be challenging work. However, because SNAP offers such a tangible benefit to the community, the chances are good that the PSAs will be used. Ask the reporter for a contact at the station who is responsible for PSA placement.

How do I pitch a PSA?

As with a news story, the best way to pitch PSAs is to call or send a letter to the PSA director at the TV or radio station, present the local problem or situation, and show how you are providing a solution.

> **EXAMPLE**
> "There are 100,000 hungry men, women, and children in Anytown. Many of these people may be eligible for SNAP benefits, but don't know it. SNAP benefits can help them put good, healthy food on the table. At the same time, the local economy benefits from SNAP purchases."

10 Steps to Place Public Service Announcements

The steps in placing Public Service Announcements (PSAs) are similar to pitching regular stories to your local media.

Step 1 Compile Media List

Compile a media list of stations that are likely to have audiences who may be eligible for SNAP benefits and that are also likely to run PSAs. Gather contact information and add it to your list. Many stations have PSA directors who are responsible for determining which PSAs the station will air and when. (See the Media Outreach section of this toolkit for more information about media lists.)

Step 2 Background Information

Before pitching your PSAs to a local radio station, learn more about the radio station, its programming (country, news, etc.), and its audience. Check out the station's Web site. The more informed you sound about the importance of SNAP messages to the station's audience, the more effective you will be. (See the Media Outreach section of this toolkit for more information about researching news outlets.)

Step 3 Make Introductory Calls

Make introductory pitch calls before sending your PSAs to stations. Use these initial calls to double-check your contact information and build a rapport with public service and community affairs professionals. Ask for information about PSA submission requirements, such as format or length.

Step 4 Make The Pitch

A sample pitch script is provided in this toolkit. The script provides an outline of the key points you need to cover during a phone conversation or voicemail message with the community or public affairs contact. Use the script as a reference to make sure you cover all of the important points. Practice your pitch aloud at least once before calling. Do not read directly from the script as you talk. Downloadable PSAs are available on the FNS Web site http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/radio/default.htm

Step 5 Deliver PSAs To Stations

Consider personally delivering your PSAs and a cover letter to the stations on your list. If you have not yet established a relationship, mail your materials. Follow up about a week later.

Step 6 Make Follow Up Calls

If needed, continue placing follow up calls for several weeks to find out if your announcement will run.

Best Time to Pitch PSAs

PSAs can be used at any time of year, but your pitch to radio stations will be more effective if you can find a "hook" to encourage them to run the announcements. This could include:

End of School
In communities that don't participate in the Summer Food Service Program, many children who receive at least one full, healthy meal a day during the school year lose that safety net in the summer, when school is out.

Holiday Season
People are acutely aware of hunger and nutrition issues around the holidays.

During National or Local "Awareness" Weeks or Months
Some awareness weeks may make audiences more receptive to SNAP information — for example, National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week (which is the week before Thanksgiving) and National Nutrition Month (March).

When Paid Advertisements Are Running
Paid advertisements from the national media campaign may be running in your area (you can find out by visiting *http://www.fns.usda. gov/snap/outreach/radio-buys_2010.htm*). If paid advertisements are airing locally, use that information to leverage your PSA request.

Step 7 Provide Additional Information

Once you begin pitching your PSAs, some radio stations may request more information about SNAP benefits or your work to reduce hunger. The <u>Media Outreach</u> section of this toolkit contains media and messaging materials to help prepare your spokesperson.

Step 8 Measure Success

Ask your contacts at the radio stations if they can provide you with specific information on when and how many times your PSA was aired. Track the success of your effort by identifying any increase in the number of calls to your toll-free number during the period when the PSAs ran.

Step 9 Present Findings

Compile your evaluation findings into a memo or presentation to share with your organization and/or partners.

Step 10 Take It To The Next Level

Based on the success of your PSA campaign, you may want to consider a formal partnership with the station, perhaps along with a commercial underwriter such as a grocery store. For more information about partnerships, see the <u>Partnership</u> section of this toolkit.

Public Service Announcement Readers

What are "readers"?

"Readers" are brief announcements promoting SNAP. Readers are given to radio stations so that their on-air talent can read them live whenever time permits.

Format for readers should include time for message and tagline.

SAMPLE READERS

:10 SECONDS

SAMPLE 1
The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program helps low-income people eat right when money's tight. Call 1-800-221-5689 today. (6.5)
A message from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. (3.5)

SAMPLE 2
The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program can help you or someone you know to eat right when money's tight. Call 1-800-221-5689 today. (6.5)
A message from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. (3.5)

:15 SECONDS

SAMPLE 1
The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program can help stretch your budget at the grocery store. It'll help you eat right when money's tight.
Call 1-800-221-5689 today. (11.5)
A message from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. (3.5)

SAMPLE 2
Keeping up with the fast pace of life takes eating right, especially when money's tight. If you have low income, consider the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Call 1-800-221-5689 today. (11.5)
A message from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. (3.5)

SAMPLE 3
Attention low-income seniors — the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program can help you eat right when money's tight.
Call 1-800-221-5689 for more information. (11.5)
A message from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. (3.5)

PSA Pitch Script Template

(Note: This sample script targets stations with elderly audiences.)

Hello, my name is XX and I am calling from [YOUR ORGANIZATION]. Is this a good time? (*If not, ask when you can call them back.*) You may not be aware that XX elderly people in [NAME OF STATE/ CITY] are having trouble putting food on the table, and are not taking advantage of help that they qualify for.

[YOUR ORGANIZATION] is hoping you will help us address this situation by broadcasting PSAs about the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). By spreading the message about SNAP benefits, older members of our community will learn more about the program and how to enroll.

Is this something you think you or your station would be interested in using? I'd be happy to send you some sample PSAs. Please feel free to contact me at XX if you have any questions about SNAP or the PSAs. Again, my name is XX and my number is XX.

Cover Letter for Using Local Readers for PSAs

[DATE]

To: Public Affairs Director
From: [NAME & ORGANIZATION]
RE: [CITY/STATE] SNAP Outreach Effort
(You can add additional information like "To Help Elderly Access Benefits")

Only about half of those eligible to receive SNAP benefits are currently enrolled.
In [STATE/CITY/TOWN], low-income seniors are feeling the pinch due to bills and other expenses, and are not getting the proper nutrition. By defraying the cost of groceries, SNAP allows recipients to use their limited incomes on other important basic needs like housing, medical costs, transportation, and utilities.

[YOUR ORGANIZATION] is kicking off a "Benefit Bus" tour on [DATE] to help seniors in [STATE/CITY/TOWN] access SNAP benefits without the challenge of finding transportation to a local SNAP office. This bus tour will span X days and X locations from [TIME]. SNAP outreach coordinators will be on hand to prescreen seniors and provide a checklist of necessary paperwork.

Below are scripts for PSAs notifying your listeners about upcoming enrollment activities.
We would appreciate it if your station would read these announcements as often as possible before the event kicks off on [DATE] and throughout the [TIME FRAME OF EVENT].
Thank you in advance for helping connect seniors in [STATE/CITY/TOWN] to the nutrition assistance they need.

RADIO (15 seconds)
SNAP helps you buy the groceries you need. You may qualify and not know it.
[YOUR ORGANIZATION]'s "Benefit Bus" tour will stop at assisted living locations in [NAME OF CITY/TOWN] from [DATE] to [DATE]. Find out more by calling XXX-XXX-XXXX.

RADIO (30 seconds)
With bills and doctor visits, expenses can add up quickly. Sometimes, that makes it hard to put good food on the table. SNAP helps you buy the groceries you need. You may qualify and not know it. Eligibility for SNAP benefits is based on income and other expenses. For most seniors, the benefit is enough to make a real difference. [YOUR ORGANIZATION]'s "Benefit Bus" tour will stop at assisted living locations in [NAME OF CITY/TOWN] from [DATE] to [DATE].
Find out more by calling XXX-XXX-XXXX.

Cover Letter for Using USDA-Produced PSAs

[DATE]

To: Public Affairs Director
From: [NAME & ORGANIZATION]
RE: SNAP Outreach Effort

Have you ever had to choose between paying the heating bill or having enough food for dinner? Have you been faced with the impossible choice of buying medicine for your sick child or food for the family table? Every day, thousands of people in [NAME OF STATE/TOWN/CITY] grapple with issues like these. But they don't have to.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) helps low-income people purchase nutritious, healthy food. However, only half of those eligible to receive SNAP benefits are currently enrolled.

At [YOUR ORGANIZATION], we are working hard to raise awareness about SNAP benefits in our community. Many people have a difficult time making ends meet. By helping out with the grocery bill, SNAP benefits allow recipients to use their limited income on other important basic needs like housing, medical costs, transportation, and utilities. We are interested in working with your station to inform listeners about SNAP and how to enroll.

In addition to PSA scripts and readers, taped PSAs are available. We can send you these fully produced spots via e-mail or on a CD. We would appreciate it if your station could roll these announcements into your programming and air them as often as possible.
(Mention how you will follow up with the station and how they can contact you.)

Thank you in advance for helping our community "eat right when money's tight."

[NAME & ORGANIZATION]

Promising Practices

Promising Practices are Online

Go to: *www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach* and click on "Promising Practices."

What is a promising practice?

"Promising practices" are everywhere. New ideas or refinements of existing ideas are continuously being implemented by State and local programs to educate and help individuals access their programs. Promising practices may involve big or little changes to existing projects to improve service delivery. They may or may not have evidence of positive results from evaluations; in fact, they might just have a general intuitive appeal rather than a proven effect. Promising practices sometimes prompt completely different ideas. Sometimes, promising practices are those "A-ha!" moments — something that makes sense but you did not think significant right away. Unfortunately, practical knowledge in one community that could lead to significant improvements in another often goes unshared.

Who is compiling our promising practices?

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is compiling promising practices to assist States, local agencies, community and faith-based organizations, and others to share their best ideas.

Why is SNAP sharing the practices?

SNAP's collection of promising practices is an effort to find and share outreach or customer service models that can help increase participation in SNAP. Through this collection of promising practices, timely information on program and policy innovations is disseminated so that all stakeholders may benefit from the experiences of their peers across the country. The sharing of ideas can stimulate program changes, spark creative exchanges, and serve as a launching pad for the next generation of program innovations. It can inspire a dynamic examination of ways to improve service delivery systems for people eligible for, applying for, and participating in SNAP.

Whom can I contact for more information?

The project's name and a contact person are listed by each promising practice. SNAP has developed an informal process of collecting promising practices. We encourage you to get in touch with the listed contact people for more details. The Web site is updated continually so check back often.

How can I share my promising practice?

Submit your practice to us through the FNS Web site. Tell us about something new you did or how you put an innovative twist on an existing idea. Go ahead and brag about the response you received — from your co-workers, managers, or your customers. This is an opportunity to shine while you give others ideas to improve or develop their projects. Worried that your idea may not be new? Not to worry; something that is "old hat" to some may be a complete revelation to others.

Are you looking for a new idea?

On the Web site, you will find information that you can use in your own project. You can learn about promising practices from around the country as well as from other programs.

Who can use the Web site?

The Web site is for State and local SNAP agencies as well as Federal/State program staff, volunteers, community members, policymakers, funders, researchers, or anyone else who wants to develop a project or improve the quality of their existing programs.

Some Examples Of Promising Practices

Media Outreach

- **Vermont** Partnering with Vermont Campaign to End Childhood Hunger and Vermont Grocer's Association, the State SNAP agency held a press conference at a supermarket to announce changes in SNAP that make it easier to apply.

Developing Partnerships

- **California** In partnership with the local food bank, Alameda County Social Services facilitated periodic SNAP outreach trainings for organizations interested in helping their own clients apply for SNAP benefits. Participants received a training manual complete with tools and resources to help them get started in their own SNAP outreach efforts.

- **California** Alameda County Food Bank provided on-site "Food Stamp Enrollment Clinics" for clients of other community-based organizations. Bilingual staff from the food bank prescreened clients for potential eligibility and assisted them in completing the application.

- **Connecticut** The State agency sent mailings to soup kitchens, food pantries, and shelters to ask them to make SNAP applications and information available to their customers.

- **New York** The Korean Grocers Association in New York City published SNAP information in Korean.

- **Pennsylvania** Pathmark grocery stores in underserved areas of Philadelphia hosted eligibility prescreening events.

- **Virginia** Americorps volunteers in rural counties of the State went door to door to provide information on SNAP. They talked to people about SNAP benefits while grocery shopping, hosted outreach gatherings, prescreened for potential eligibility, and helped complete application forms.

Using PSAs

- **California** The Food Bank of Santa Cruz and San Benito Counties aired television ads to market the nutrition and health benefits of SNAP.

- **California** The Food Bank of Santa Cruz and San Benito Counties developed a 5-minute video in English and Spanish that answers 12 commonly asked questions about SNAP benefits. The video was distributed to health and social service agencies on California's central coast.